

“Thou which art I”

The Speaker and the Addressee in the
Poetry of John Donne

A thesis
submitted
in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
in
English Literature
in the
University of Canterbury
by
Stephen A. Tyerman.

University of Canterbury
1998

CONTENTS

CHAPTER

Acknowledgements	2
Abstract	3
1 "Thou Which Art I"	4
2 Donne and Formalist Poetics	2 8
3 The Petrarchan Addressee	4 3
4 Donne and Ovid	6 2
5 The Role of the Addressee	8 4
6 Absence	10 6
Bibliography	11 8

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank all those who have tolerated me during the time which it took to complete this thesis. Among these are my flatmate, Marc, my parents, my neighbour, Paul, and my supervisor, Professor David Gunby.

ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the relationship between the speaker and the addressee in the poetry John Donne. Though Donne's poetry is complex, it nevertheless has the directness of speech. Donne tends to justify this directness by focusing his words on a specific addressee. Yet the complexity and, at times, the inconsistency of what Donne has to say often make his verse inappropriate for the figures that he seems to be addressing. Frequently, it is obvious that the real addressee of a poem is not its supposed auditor, but its reader. Yet even the reader may find it hard to determine what Donne means to say, since he combines such a variety of discourses. For example, a poem may be Petrarchan, Ovidian, and even religious, with the result that the reader cannot quite determine its register or know precisely what argument it advances. Often, one suspects that Donne is merely elaborating a train of thought, and yet the spoken quality of his verse usually prevents it from seeming introspective.

My first chapter cites the exalted and intimate relationship that Donne claims to exist between himself and the addressee of one of his verse letters, and contrasts that claim with the public nature of the poem in which it appears. Subsequently in this chapter, I draw attention to the tendency for Donne's language to be excessive and even inappropriate for its nominal addressee, and I conclude by offering two conflicting accounts of the wide-ranging nature of metaphysical wit. In my second chapter, I attempt to relate the way Donne relies on his addressees for self-articulation to Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogical conception of language. This chapter continues with an assessment of an opposing tendency in Donne - his need to monopolise the resources of language - that draws on the ideas of Roman Jakobson. The third chapter aims to summarise Donne's assimilation, and also his rejection, of Petrarchism; and the fourth assesses his debt to Ovid and his combination of Ovidianism with Petrarchism. In my fifth chapter, I attempt to trace Donne's manipulation of the addressee from his epigrams to the *Songs and Sonets*. The concluding chapter deals with Donne's reaction to the threat of absence. Here, I shall relate his anxiety to communicate to the mood of isolation and pessimism that sometimes breaks out in his prose and verse letters.

1. "THOU WHICH ART I"

Two of Donne's verse letters, "The Storme" and "The Calme," are unusual among his poems for the ease with which they can be contextualized, whether biographically, historically, or in terms of contemporary response and criticism. We know what stimulated their composition: the vicissitudes of the weather during the Islands Voyage of 1597, an ill-fated example of official anti-Spanish piracy in which Donne himself took part. We also know that the addressee of "The Storme" - and probably of "The Calme," since the two poems come close to forming a continuous narrative - was Christopher Brooke. Brooke was one of Donne's closest friends during his years as a student of Lincoln's Inn, and the two remained close until Brooke's death in 1627. We can guess the strength of their friendship from the fact that Brooke was best man at Donne's secret marriage in 1601. Brooke and his brother Samuel, who officiated at the wedding, suffered a short term of imprisonment for their part in provoking the bride's father. Donne, likewise, was imprisoned, though for a shorter time, and took steps immediately after his release to secure the liberty of the Brookes. Christopher Brooke was also a writer of verses, and this, as Bald speculates,¹ probably drew Donne to him.

The evidence so far presented suggests that in selecting Brooke as the recipient of these two verse letters Donne was addressing himself to one who could be counted upon to respond to his experiences with the greatest possible interest and sympathy. Yet, in seeming contradiction of their intimate context, there is evidence that "The Storme" and "The Calme" attained widespread popularity and esteem during Donne's lifetime; and this despite the fact that - as with the vast majority of his poems - they remained unpublished until two years after his death. Thomas Freeman's short tribute "To John Dunne," published in 1614, is, according to Bald, a "fairly typical"² assessment of Donne's reputation among his broader London readership during the early seventeenth-century:

¹ R.C. Bald, *John Donne: A Life* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970) p. 56. Hereafter cited as Bald.

² Bald, p.283.

The *Storme* describ'd, hath set thy name afloat,
 Thy *Calme*, a gale of famous winde hath got:
 Thy *Satyres* short, too soon we them o'relooke,
 I prethee Persius write a bigger booke.³

Surprisingly, there is no mention here of the lyrics which maintain Donne's popularity in our own time. The only contemporary reference to the reading of Donne's lyrics is the entry "Ihone Dones lyrics"⁴ in Drummond of Hawthornden's book-list. Indeed, according to Alan MacColl, there seems to have been "a general ignorance of the very existence of the lyrics."⁵

For further evidence of the high repute of "The Calme" we have the reported views of the exacting and opinionated Ben Jonson. According to Drummond of Hawthornden, Jonson considered Donne to be "the first poet in the World in some things."⁶ The implication is that Donne sometimes failed to reach the very high standard of his best work; but what were the "things" which Jonson valued so highly? Drummond continues: "his verses of the Lost Chaine, he heth by Heart & that passage, of the calme, that dust and feathers doe not stirr, all was quiet." The first mentioned is Donne's "The Bracelet"; this, then, is one of the "things" which place Donne so high in Jonson's estimation: why else would he trouble to memorise it? Yet the second "thing" is not a complete poem but a "passage." The "passage" is easy to locate; it occurs in lines seventeen to eighteen of "The Calme": "in one place lay / Feathers and dust, to day and yesterday."⁷ Jonson probably remembered more than these mere one-and-a-half lines (one suspects that Drummond is citing all that *he* can remember of Jonson's performance). But in any case, for some reason, Jonson did not memorise "The Calme" in its entirety.

³ Bald, p.283.

⁴ See Alan MacColl, "The Circulation of Donne's Poems in Manuscript" in *John Donne: Essays in Celebration* ed. A.J. Smith (London: Methuen, 1972) p.31.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.31.

⁶ William Drummond of Hawthornden, *Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden* abridged in *John Donne; The Complete English Poems*, ed. C.A. Patrides (London: Everyman, 1994) pp. 398-99.

⁷ All quotations from Donne's poetry taken from Patrides, *op. cit.*

We cannot, of course, assume that Jonson thought the rest of "The Calme" not worth remembering. But perhaps it is no accident that the lines he definitely remembered are not figuratively embellished; for who could easily remember lines like these?

Now, as a Miriade
Of Ants, durst th'Emperours lov'd snake invade,
The crawling Gallies, Sea-goales, finny chips,
Might brave our Venices, now bed-ridde ships.
(*"The Calme,"* 35-38)

It takes some dexterity (and for modern readers a few helpful footnotes) to work out what these lines mean, and even then they are not particularly satisfactory. Rosamund Tuve, who is ready to defend Donne's boldest figurative language as decorous by Renaissance standards, admits that "the crowding of his tropes"⁸ might have caused offence. This is exactly what happens here. In the space of one line we are asked to think of "Gallies" as "crawling," because oar-driven; "goales," because the oarsmen are prisoners; "finny" because the oars go up-and-down together; "chips," because they are small and made of wood. The problem does not lie with the images themselves. Each of them taken separately is fine, even ingenious: put together, they become incoherent because the disparate tropes prevent the reader from focusing on the subject. Donne is so bent on exercising his ability to find surprising correspondences that he tactlessly overlooks the need for fusion, whether in his range of metaphors or in the comprehension of his reader. Rosamund Tuve may be allowed her point (which is the basic theory of her book) that the function of Elizabethan imagery, and of metaphysical imagery in particular, is conceptual rather than visual. Yet imagery cannot function smoothly as an aid to conception when the images fall so closely together as to form a multiple mixed-metaphor. Such compression merely draws attention to the images themselves because the reader's attention is wholly involved in an attempt to

⁸ Rosamund Tuve, *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947) p.31. Hereafter cited as Tuve.

reconcile them. This cannot but be termed an infringement of the principle of decorum. Tuve implies as much herself, when she states that “[c]onstant adjustment to some hypothetical reader is responsible for much advice in renaissance poetic.”⁹ In Puttenham’s *The Arte of English Poesie*, the basis of the principle is laid out as follows:

our speech asketh one maner of *decencie*, in respect of the person who speakes : another of his to whom it is spoken : another of whom we speake : another of what we speake, and in what place and time and to what purpose.¹⁰

Clearly, the principle of decorum (“*decencie*”), as stated here, admits of considerable flexibility. But it cannot be denied that Donne has transgressed the principle in two respects, in that he fails to consider “to whom” and “of what” he speaks.

An intention to involve the reader in the speaker’s situation is boldly stated at the outset of “The Storme,” and may be thought to operate equally in “The Calme,” since the poems are sequential:

Thou which art I, (‘tis nothing to be soe)
Thou which art still thy selfe, by these shall know
Part of our passage; And, a hand, or eye
By *Hilliard* drawne, is worth an history,
By a worse painter made; and (without pride)
When by thy judgement they are dignifi’d,
My lines are such.

(1-7)

The indecorous use of imagery that I have pointed out in “The Calme” is a serious fault in a poem which sets this task for itself. But the lapse is temporary, and contrasts with the many successes of these poems in carrying out the Horatian injunction “*Ut pictura poesis*,” implied in lines three to five. Pictorial vividness is shown in that piece of fine detail picked out by Jonson: “in one place lay / Feathers and dust, to day and

⁹ Tuve, p. 180.

¹⁰ George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (London: Constable and Co., 1906) p.270. Hereafter cited as Puttenham.

yesterday”; and in the ingenious comparison of “Waves like a rowling trench” (“The Storme,” 28). Nor is sight the only sense invoked. The welcome gust of wind which allowed the fleet to leave Plymouth “kist our sails,” and was “fresh and sweet” as food to a hungry stomach (19). The gale which beset the fleet in the Bay of Biscay was abrupt and unexpected, “Like shot, not fear’d, till felt” (30). In these and other examples Donne shows an ability to convey ideas and impressions with tactile and physical immediacy. At one level, then, the communicativeness of these verse letters lies in their appeal to the reader’s consciousness of having a body.

Another means by which “The Storme” and “The Calme” enjoin their reader to participate in the speaker’s situation is the presence, as figurative language and analogy, of a fair selection from the mental *bric-a-brac* of a typical, young, worldly, educated Englishman of Donne’s generation. Both poems bulge with this kind of material. In “The Storm” alone, there is the fashionable connoisseurship implied in a reference to “*Hilliard*”(4); the conventional patriotism of “England to whom we owe, what we be, and have” (9); smug derision of “jealous husbands” (50). The list could be extended to include references to the Bible; to contemporary customs; to common sights; and to current pseudo-scientific notions. But the most interesting analogy, in terms of its appeal to the reader’s knowledge, is the one that refers to the continued imprisonment of those who, having served their term, cannot pay the jailer’s fees:

in the port, our fleet dear time did leese,
Withering like prisoners, which lye but for fees,
(17-18)

This lines must have particularly appealed to a reader who had some knowledge of the law.

It might be said that though Donne is at sea, his two verse letters are preoccupied with London life. John Carey takes this as evidence that he was not so much interested in the events of the

Island Voyage, as he was in his habitual life on dry land.¹¹ His view has some validity: Donne was a Londoner by birth, and his references to life outside that city are usually disparaging. But more importantly, for the purposes of this study, the use of so much topical material at a figurative level makes this the level at which experience can be shared. Those taken with the notion of "Donne the egotist" (enthusiasts and detractors alike) might claim - with some justice - that the figurative content of these poems derives, as much as the literal one, from a mind wholly taken up with its own impressions. According to this view, the diatribe which spans these two poems is reflexive in nature; and the opening of "The Storme" - "Thou which art I" - merely a pretext for the speaker to say what he wishes. Again, the charge would not be entirely unjust. I have already cited a passage from "The Calme" in which Donne's ingenuity distracts him from paying attention to the reader. But for the most part these poems seem to have been judiciously pitched at the kind of reader I have described. They speak a language similar to that of the *Satyres*; which, along with "The Storme" and "The Calme" are listed in Freeman's tribute as sources of Donne's fame. The following lines from "Satyre III" show an obvious similarity with language of the two verse letters:

Dar'st thou ayd mutinous Dutch, and dar'st thou lay
 Thee in ships woodden Sepulchers, a prey
 To leaders rage, to stormes, to shot, to dearth?
 Dar'st thou dive seas, and dungeons of the earth?
 Hast thou courageous fire to thaw the ice
 Of frozen North discoveries? and thrice
 Colder than Salamanders, like divine
 Children in th'oven, fires of Spain, and the line,
 Whose countries limbecks to our bodies bee,
 Cans't thou for gaine bear? and must every hee
 Which cryes not, Goddesses, to thy mistresse, draw,
 Or eat thy poisonous words?

(17-28)

¹¹See John Carey, *John Donne: Mind, Life and Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981) pp.67-68. Hereafter cited as Carey.

The preoccupations here are clearly similar to those of the verse letters, most obviously in the sense of excitement - albeit zealously derided - with naval adventure. Mistressing, an occupation alluded to in "The Calme" (8), will become the guiding metaphor in the satire's attempt to define "our Mistresse, faire Religion" (5). Line nineteen possibly draws on Donne's own seafaring experiences: the Island Voyage was marred, among other things, by the rival egos of its joint "leaders," Essex and Raleigh. Satire as a verse genre became fashionable during the 1590s, and its main practitioners were Inns of Court men, such as Marston, Hall, Guilpin - and, of course, Donne. The kinship of "The Storme" and "The Calme" with the *Satyres* is hence another clue to their likely readership; indeed, it narrows that readership down from its size at the time when Freeman was writing, to its extent in 1597, when the verse letters were composed.

But the main clue to the two verse letters' having, initially, an audience centred around the Inns of Court is their recipient. Christopher Brooke was, as we have seen, an Inns of Court man. Like Donne, he had received his legal education at Lincoln's Inn; but unlike Donne, he went on to become a barrister, and would therefore have maintained a closer connection with that institution than was possible for Donne. The fact that Brooke was the recipient of "The Storme" - and probably of "The Calme" - raises an interesting problem regarding Donne's conception of his addressee. As I have suggested, the reception of the two verse letters was both private and public. On the one hand, they have the character of private correspondence with a trusted friend and fellow writer. As such, the intimacy they claim could hardly be greater: Brooke is Donne's other self ("Thou which art I"); he alone has sufficient "judgement" to "dignify" Donne's poetic exertions with success. The allusion to "*Hilliard*" is significant here. Donne is claiming for himself the miniaturist's skill and limitation, since he relates only "part of our passage." He is neither a "history" painter nor, as his pun implies, a historiographer; but Brooke's wisdom and connoisseurship will enable him to judge the effort appropriately, according to its scale and genre. Moreover, the analogy with miniature painting suggests that Brooke should think of the letter as a kind of keepsake. The practice of giving

miniatures figures several times in Donne's work, notably in the elegy "His Picture." Typically, however, the it occurs in the context of heterosexual love, and the size of the keepsake makes it an appropriate gift when love has need of secrecy.

Further elements in the opening lines of "The Storme" elevate Donne's friendship with Brooke in terms as hyperbolic - and as potentially blasphemous - as any he bestowed on a mistress. A close reading of the statement "T'is the preheminnence / Of friendship onely t'impute excellence" reveals two possible references to Christian theology. Firstly, one may relate Brooke's "friendship" to Augustinian *caritas*. According to Augustine, this power of the Christian soul enables the exegete to decipher the true meaning of scripture.¹² This, at a secular level, is precisely the service which Donne hopes Brooke to perform for his text. Secondly, there is the theological term "impute," which refers to the Augustinian doctrine of imputed grace.¹³ Brooke, it seems, is not only to be the enlightened exegete of Donne's text, but is in some sense comparable with the God of Protestant theology, the sole dispenser of personal salvation.

All this is much less far-fetched than it seems. Both of the theological references that I have proposed are Augustinian; and both are central to the Lutheran and Calvinist opposition to the authority of the Roman church. Augustine's idea that scripture could be interpreted by the individual infused with *caritas* was used by Luther to assert the right of the true believer to have direct access to the meaning of the Bible. The Augustinian doctrine of predestination ("imputed grace") was of course Luther's weapon against the Church's practice of selling indulgences. Both these spiritual issues would have been very much on Donne's mind at about the time when he was composing "The Storme"; for he needed at this time, as he later recalled in *Pseudo-Martyr*, "to blot out, certaine impressions of the Romane religion."¹⁴

¹² See Joseph A. Mazzeo, *Renaissance and Seventeenth Century Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964) p.5.

¹³ The term is used in Donne's "Elegie XIX," where it is parodied in the appraisal of women as "mystique books, which only wee / (Whom their imputed grace will dignify) / Must see reveal'd" (43-44).

¹⁴ See John Carey, ed. *John Donne*, (Oxford University Press, 1990) p.190.

But there is more such matter if we choose to find it. Donne claims, in the first line of "The Storme," that he is "nothing." Again, as we shall see, the word is heavy with theological significance. Towards the end of "The Calme," Donne alludes to God's creation of Adam from nothing: "How little more alas / Is man now, then before he was? he was / Nothing" (51-53). Becalmed, Donne and his fellow voyagers are "for nothing fit" (53). Can it be that Brooke is, in some sense, to be Donne's Creator? This outlandish theological reading is, like the others that I have proposed, less unlikely as it seems. We may, if we choose, find confirmation of it if we look closely at the opening lines of "The Storme":

Thou which art I, ('tis nothing to be soe)
Thou which art still thy selfe

While Donne is an uncreated "nothing," Brooke is "still thyself." Likewise, according to orthodox theology, Creation, being a gratuitous act of God, made no alteration to God's independent existence. Moreover, God's most sacred name in Hebrew - *Yahwe* - means, according to its English translation in the King James Bible, "I AM THAT I AM."¹⁵

Such interpretation of Donne's texts can often run the risk of finding too much consistency - and too much seriousness - in the mind of their author. Given the evidence so far, it would take only a little more word-play to supply Christopher Brooke with all three attributes of the Trinity: "power, to love, to know" (Donne: *The Litanie*, 36). Yet Donne is fond of attributing Godlike powers to a poem's addressee, and the mixture in his work of praise, jest, and - at times - cynicism makes it often difficult for us to guess how much sincerity underlies the attribution. "The Dreame" is a case in point. Here, the female addressee, having woken the speaker from an erotic dream, is praised for knowing his thoughts "beyond an Angels art" (16). Such Godlike omniscience would, he concludes, make it "Prophane, to think thee any thing but thee" (20). Yet the poem is itself decidedly profane and perhaps describes nothing more than a successful

¹⁵ Ex.3.14.

seduction. But it is often in his verse letters that we find Donne's most extravagant use religious hyperbole in praise of an addressee. In a verse letter "To the Countess of Bedford," Donne does not hesitate to compare his patroness with the Godhead: she is "divinity" (2), to be sought by faith and natural reason; her chosen "friends" (10) are glorified like the elect in heaven.

So much for the extraordinary comparisons with which Donne is prepared to grace his addressees and correspondents. I must now try to account for the popularity of "The Storme" and "The Calme": a troublesome issue, since, on the face of it, these poems are private letters. Obviously, they were passed around. Donne's biographer, Isaac Walton, states that Donne's poems were "loosely (God knows too loosely) scattered in his youth."¹⁶ He alludes of course to the practice of distributing poetry in manuscript, whether in the author's hand or another's transcription. This was the means by which a gentleman writer could achieve self-publicity without soiling his hands through publication. For us, the idea that "The Storme" and "The Calme" were passed from hand to hand seems to discredit the intimacy of "Thou which art I." Nevertheless, Brooke must have made these poems available to other readers, and Donne probably intended him to do so; for he would hardly have gone to the trouble of writing such well-finished poetry to entertain only one of his friends. We must, then, conceive of Brooke as a kind of depot for Donne's writing, and there is evidence that he was prepared to serve this function. A written collection of poetry by Donne (not all of it genuine) was made, in 1610, by Drummond of Hawthornden. Among the poems is a transcript of Donne's "Satyre II," with a note beside it: "Satyre 2 after C. B. copy."¹⁷ It seems that Christopher Brooke had allowed Hawthornden to copy "Satyre II" from his own manuscript during the latter's visit to London. Perhaps this satire, which inveighs against legal corruption, was originally addressed to Brooke. Its opening lines certainly bring to mind Donne's verse letters:

Sir; though (I thank God for it) I do hate

¹⁶ Izaak Walton, *The Lives of John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Richard Hooker, George Herbert, and Robert Sanderson*, abridged in Patrides p. 403.

¹⁷ See Bald, p. 19.

Perfectly all this towne, yet there's one state
 In all ill things so excellently best,
 That hate, toward them, breeds pitty towards the rest.
 (1-4)

The conclusion cannot be avoided that Donne's elaborate demonstration of friendship towards Brooke was - in part - a public performance. Thus, Donne's plea to be created from "nothing" is perhaps, covertly, an advertisement of the hope of preferment. After all, the term "creation" was used then, just as is is now, to denote conferment of a title. Moreover, the dependants of a noble were called (sometimes pejoratively) his "creatures." Donne may have expected his friend to take the hint, and to ensure that his verse letter stood a good chance of falling, eventually, into the right hands. In a letter written several years later when Donne was without employment, he complains to Henry Goodyer of his uselessness and isolation: "to be no part of any body is to be nothing."¹⁸ But even more suggestive, with respect to Donne's petitioning the reader of the two verse letters to be his Creator, is a letter to Goodyer in which he explicitly compares the bestowal of friendship with Creation: "There is some of the honour and some of the degrees of Creation, to make a friendship of nothing."¹⁹ Goodyer was Donne's closest friend, and so one is reluctant to think such flattery entirely unmeant. Even so, at the time when he wrote this letter Donne's fortunes were at their lowest ebb, and the letter is obviously aimed at reminding Goodyer that he is one of Donne's few remaining connections with persons of rank and influence. "I know you have many worthy friends of all ranks,"²⁰ Donne remarks with careful off-handedness; and proffers his "truth and honesty"²¹ as qualities making him worthy to rank among Goodyer's rich friends.

¹⁸ Edmund Gosse, *The Life and Letters of John Donne, dean of St. Paul's* vol.1 (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1959) p.191. Hereafter cited as Gosse.

¹⁹ John Donne, *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour*, intro. M. Thomas Hester (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, Inc., 1977) p.65. Hereafter cited as Hester.

²⁰ Hester, p.65.

²¹ Hester, p.65.

It is thus apparent that Donne's deification of an addressee, and in particular his figurative allusion to Creation, were associated in his mind with the hope of favour and advancement. Moreover, "The Calme" and "the Storme" can be construed as advertisements of Donne's patriotic commitment to "England to whom we owe, what we be, and have" ("The Storme," 9). Donne, having been born into a prominent Catholic family, needed to defend himself against the widespread suspicion that all Catholics were potential traitors. According to George Parfitt, "the existence of letter-writing in verse means that such a letter is simultaneously addressed to its formal recipient and to another who might read the letter as a contribution to the genre."²² In the case of "The Storme" and "The Calme," however, Donne was assuming that his verse letters would be read not merely as "a contribution to the genre," but as testimonies of his sound politics.

I have suggested that by writing to Brooke, Donne was hoping to attract attention of the kind which would gain him preferment. In order to clarify such an intention, I return to his *Satyres*. These, as I have noted, were written in the environment of the Inns of Court and deliberately pitched at its student residents. But according to Parfitt, the Inns of Court satirist hoped to reach a broader audience than that comprised by his fellow students. The invective of satire is frequently directed at the corruption of Court; such is the case with Donne's "Satyre IV." Yet the young satirist's disdain for courtly manners and procedures shows him not so much an enemy of the Court, as an aspirant to Court employment. His knowledge and dislike of corruption could be taken as a sign of his fitness to be employed. Parfitt gives the following description of the Inns of Court satirist:

His art is that of the young male in a position of privilege and potential. The potential leads to a second audience, for the Inns of Court existed in close proximity to the Court itself. Not only did the Inns entertain the Court on occasion but they provided many men who went on to distinguished careers in government. A social function of the kind of writing done by

²² George Parfitt, *John Donne: A Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1989) p.69.

Davies, Marston and Donne was to draw the attention of the Court to the writers of the Inns, with the prospect of employment and/or favour.²³

Thus much of Donne's early poetry is written in the hope that his audience will be broader than the one he purports to address. The resulting dual audience can be seen as a factor at work both in his *Satyres* and in the more modest form of the verse letter.

Must we then dismiss the intimacy implied in the opening of "The Storme" as patently insincere? Or, to avoid moralising, as an expectation of its genre? I suggest, with due caution, that we should not limit ourselves to either view. Certainly, Donne is a performer: an actor whose attention is divided between the stage character at whom he directs his speech, and the audience judging his performance. But it is wrong to believe that communication - direct communication - held no importance for Donne, or that he invariably used the addressees of his letters and verse letters as mere tools for furthering his motive of self-advancement. For one thing, it is evident that friendship held a high value for Donne. Brooke was not the only friend who would have read the words "Tis the preheminance of friendship onely to'impute excellence." Another verse letter, "To Mr I. L." speaks of "that short Roll of friends writ in my heart" (1).

In a letter to his lifelong friend Henry Goodyer, Donne describes the activity of letter-writing in terms reminiscent of his love lyric, "The Exstasy":

I make account that this writing of letters, when it is with any seriousness, is a kind of exstasie, and a departure and secession and suspension of the soul, which doth then communicate it self to two bodies: And as I would every day provide for my souls last convoy, though I know not when I shall die, and perchance I shall never die; so for these exstasies in letters, I often times deliver myself over in writing when I know not when those letters shall be sent to you, and many times they never are, for I

²³ Ibid., p.14.

have a little satisfaction in seeing a letter to you on my table, though I meet no opportunity of sending it.²⁴

The letter ends with a revealing statement: Donne feels "a little satisfaction" at having written to Goodyer, whether the letter reaches him or not. The very idea of correspondence - the mere pretext of communication - is what stimulates Donne to "deliver myself over in writing." In a verse letter, "To Sir Henry Wotton" (one of his "short Roll of friends"), Donne claims that "But for these [i.e., letters] / I could ideate nothing" (4). Here it seems that Donne cannot even articulate his thoughts without the notion that he is speaking to another.

Obviously, Donne needs the addressees of his letters for reasons of self-articulation whose importance threatens to exceed the addressees' value to him as friends. At the end of a compendious and introspective letter to Goodyer, Donne feels the need to apologise: "But Sir, I am beyond my purpose; I mean to write a Letter, and I am fallen into a discourse."²⁵ The tendency for Donne to inflict his burgeoning thoughts on his addressees is one that pervades his writing. One cannot, for example, believe that he thought any woman capable of following the complex dialectic of "The Exstasie." (His advice in 'Loves Alchymie' is to "Hope not for minde in women" [23].) Yet in the "dialogue of one" (74) of "The Exstasy," Donne fancifully assumes that his words are instantly intelligible for the woman. Similarly, when writing to Goodyer, Donne imagines that a taxing disquisition concerning the current state of religion will "communicate it self"²⁶ as swiftly as if his soul had gone to dwell in Goodyer's body.

The problem is that Donne's love of inclusiveness, his impulse to search out every crevice of his mind, often tempts him to say more than could possibly be appropriate for anyone he chose to address. ("Wit, abstracted from its effects on the hearer"²⁷ is Johnson's diagnosis.) This inclusiveness is made possible by an expansion of the associative faculty (which is of course one way

²⁴ Hester, p.11.

²⁵ Hester, p.72.

²⁶ Hester, p.11.

²⁷ Samuel Johnson, "The Life of Cowley" in *The Metaphysical Poets* ed. Gerald Hammond (London: MacMillan, 1974) p.51.

of restating Johnson's well-known definition of metaphysical wit: "the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together"²⁸). George Herbert reflects on this aspect of the metaphysical style in a poem which condemns it, "Jordan (II)":

Thousands of notions in my brain did runne,
Offering their service, if I were not sped
I often blotted what I had begunne - ²⁹

(7-9)

"Jordan (II)" is loosely modelled on the first sonnet of Sidney's sequence. But there is a telling difference between Herbert and Sidney as each reflects on the difficulty of writing poetry. Herbert cannot keep pace with his "notions"; he has too many of them. Sidney finds both thinking and writing laborious:

words came halting forth, wanting Inventions stay;
Invention, Nature's child, fled stepdame Study's blows, ³⁰

(9-10)

The difference may well be attributable to the different poetic influences affecting Sidney and Herbert. Though Sidney is of course parading his writer's block as proof of his sincerity, he is nevertheless in the difficult position of trying to derive fresh poetry from the overworked material of Petrarchism. Herbert, on the other hand, is over-stimulated by the wit of his mentor, Donne. Since Herbert's task is to find a decorous manner in which to address God, he must to suppress the habits of mind that he has acquired from reading Donne.

All of the elegies written on the death of Donne attest to their writers' having to deal with his enlargement of the possibilities of wit; whether, as with Carew, this is seen as an opportunity - "Thou has. . . open'd us a Mine / Of rich and pregnant phansie"

²⁸ Ibid., p. 51.

²⁹ See *The Works of George Herbert*, intro. Tim Cook (Ware: Wordsworth, 1994) p.92.

³⁰ See Sir Philip Sidney, *Astrophel and Stella* in *The Selected Poetry and Prose of Sidney* ed. David Kalstone (New York: Signet, 1970). All quotations from *Astrophel and Stella* taken from this edition.

(37-38) - or, as with Mayne, a difficulty: "What was thy recreation turns our brain" (25). Browne, in his elegy, praises Donne's "loose raptures" (1); and here the word "loose" probably refers not only to the wantonness of Donne's early subject-matter, but to the "libertine" freedom of his style.³¹

It is hardly coincidental that Donne should have been obsessed with the associations thrown up by his mind at a time when fresh inquiry was beginning to be made into the way the mind actually worked. The end of the Elizabethan era signalled, on the one hand, a fascination with the psychology of melancholia, as evinced by Webster and, later, Burton. On the other hand, there was coming to be a secular honesty about the mind's workings, as in Bacon and, later, Hobbes. The latter has this to say about the mind's wandering when it is governed by no specific task or desire:

there [then] is no Passionate Thought, to govern and direct those that follow, to itself, as the end and scope of some desire, or other passion: In which case the thoughts are said to wander, and seem impertinent one to another, as in a Dream. Such are commonly the thoughts of men, that are not onely without company, but also without care of any thing³²

And yet, continues Hobbes, "even then their thoughts are busie as at other times."³³ The vagrant associations of the mind are thus meaningfully related, and "a man may oft-times perceive the way of it, and the dependence of one thought upon another."³⁴ What follows in Hobbes's account reads remarkably like a description of metaphysical wit in action:

in a discourse of our present civill warre, what could seem more impertinent, than to ask, (as one did) what was the value of the Roman Penny? Yet the Cohærence to me was manifest enough.

³¹ See *The Poems of John Donne* ed. H.J.C. Grierson vol.2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912) pp.371-95.

³² Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* ed. and intro. C.B. Macpherson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968) p.95.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.95.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.95.

For the thought of the warre, introduced the Thought of the delivering up the King to his enemies; the Thought of that, brought in the Thought, of the delivering up of Christ; and that again the Thought of the 30 pence, which was the price of the treason; and all this in a moment of time; for Thought is quick.³⁵

All these associations must pass rapidly through the mind before the idea of the Civil War can terminate in the apparently heterogeneous idea of "the Roman penny." Johnson, it seems, was wrong. The metaphysicals' "ideas" were not "yoked by violence together"; these poets simply omitted the steps which led from one idea to another, and such "violence" as they did was felt by the reader (the reader of Johnson's day, of course, who wanted classical clarity rather than the wild offspring of another's brain).

Sometimes, however, Donne does not entirely follow the practice of omitting the intermediate steps between ideas. There are times, indeed, when he allows the associations to show, notably in his longer and more rambling poems. "The Bracelet," for example, is a long poem in which certain sections trace, without much deviation, a sequence of associations. In this poem, subtitled "Upon the losse of his Mistresses Chaine, for which he made her restitution," the speaker must allow his twelve gold coins (of the kind called "angels") to be melted down and forged into a new chain for his mistress. I quote a passage from the poem in which the association of ideas follows, without difficulty, from the initial pun on "angels":

Shall these twelve innocents, by thy severe
Sentence (dread judge) my sins great burden beare?
Shall they be damn'd, and in the furnace throwne
And punisht for offences not their owne?
They save not me, they doe not ease my paines,
When in that hell they're burnt and tyed in chaines;
Were they but Crownes of France, I cared not,
For, most of these, their countryes naturall rot

³⁵ Ibid., p.95.

I think possesseth,

(17-25)

This invective is held together by associations thrown up by Donne's mind as he writes, and has of course nothing to do with what he might imagine any woman - real or otherwise - to have suggested. This is part of its sarcastic wit; for by delivering this tirade at the woman, and in mock-response to suggestions that it would not have occurred to her to make, Donne's speaker emerges triumphant; while the woman (if she is present even in the fictional situation) can only be supposed to stare in silence. But more importantly, for my purposes, Donne has here succeeded in converting a succession of mental associations, which are his and his alone, into a continuous address to another. His principal means of doing this is the simple inversion of subject and verb that automatically creates the presence of an addressee. (Reverse the process and she vanishes, along with all the speaker's self-confidence.) The technique of posing questions - and in particular rhetorical questions - in series is one of Donne's favourite ways of making the associations thrown up by his own mind seem relevant to the addressees of his poetry.

There is, however, a basic difference between the passage from Hobbes and the one from "The Bracelet" with which I have sought to compare it. The associations listed by Hobbes have occurred involuntarily and in a very short space of time; whereas Donne, though I believe he draws upon much the same mental tendency, is elaborating his associations through the process of writing. Only one of the associations listed by Hobbes would normally be thought verbal. This is the metaphorical association of the capture of King Charles I with the betrayal of Christ. This, admittedly, would have seemed much more natural for the man who made it than it would to anyone today; but it is nevertheless clearly metaphorical to substitute "Christ" for "King"; and in fact this substitution occurs in the implicit metaphor of Prince Rupert's royalist battle hymn: "Christ our royal master leads against the foe."³⁶ Metaphors usually depend on an extension of synonymy; that is to say, they stretch the

³⁶ L. 5 of the popular hymn, "Onward Christian soldiers."

vocabulary of terms available in a given context to a degree that surprises us (and become dead metaphors when they no longer do so). In the section from "The Bracelet" quoted above, at least one of the associations is obviously a metaphor: "hell" (i.e. the "furnace" into which the coins are to be thrown). Other word-associations are made according to different principles: metonymy.³⁷ The metonymic principle underlies the causal progression: "sin . . . damned." But, though this progression is not in itself metaphorical, it nevertheless helps to develop a complex metaphor of the kind usually termed a "conceit." Finally, in relation to "The Bracelet," I should draw attention to another kind of word-association, one well-known to readers of Renaissance poetry: homonymy. This is present in the xenophobic pun, "French" = "rot" (i.e. syphilis, or "the French disease").

I have made this detour in order to demonstrate one thing, namely that the passage I have quoted from "The Bracelet" develops largely according to associations which are verbal. The knack for making word-associations must have been well-developed in Donne. Like most people with this gift, he probably found it difficult, at times, to suppress. Nevertheless, it is to Donne's refusal to suppress this gift that we owe many of his comic effects. The appearance of the "wrong" word can, for instance, destroy the decorum of a poem, so transforming it to a parody of the genre in which it is written. Such a transformation occurs in "Lovers Infiniteness." The poem begins tenderly, and for the first four lines one hardly notices that it is anything but decorously Petrarchan:

If yet I have not all thy love,
Deare, I shall never have it all,
I cannot breath one other sigh, to move;
Nor can intreat one other teare to fall.

(1-4)

³⁷ My usage of the term is taken from Roman Jakobson, who employs it to mean the principle of combination according to which sentences are elaborated, as opposed to the principle of selection, which governs our choice of a particular word. The latter principle he terms "metaphoric."

Nevertheless, something is beginning to go wrong. It would be quite proper for the rejected Petrarchist to tell his disdainful one that he had *breathed* sighs and made tearful entreaties; but to “breath” sighs and “intreat” the tears (rather than her) is, in effect, to tell her that the whole performance had been insincere. As the poem proceeds, the vocabulary becomes increasingly inappropriate to the fictional situation in which it is used. In the next line, Donne describes his Petrarchan sighs and tears as “my treasure”; this seems inoffensive enough until it evokes by association the word “purchase”: “my treasure, which should purchase thee” (5). It is as though Donne had been unable to resist using the wrong words at precisely those moments when he knew what the right ones should be. The effect is to shatter the fictional address by disabling it as persuasion, and to re-address the poem to those who, like the speaker, have posed, cynically, as Petrarchan lovers. Alternatively, the poem may be seen as a taunt to those who have taken that role seriously; though these two possibilities are clearly related, since the libertine would presumably enjoy the poem by picturing to himself the Petrarchist’s discomfort. Another possibility is to see the poem as a kind of palinode, a “farewell to love” in the sense of a bitter recantation of the language of Petrarchism. In any case, it is implausible to suggest that “Lovers infinitenesse” makes a realistic proposition to a real woman, even though it concludes with the anticipation of sex: “But wee will have a way more liberall, / Then changing hearts, to joyne them” (31-32). Such realism may at once be dismissed, if for no other reason than that seducers in Donne’s time would probably have done better to rely on the language of Petrarchism.

This is not to say that Donne did not wish that it might be possible to speak to a woman in such a manner. Freud makes an interesting observation in connection with the suppression of aggressive sexual talk, and its redirection from the auditor whom it directly concerns to another, who thereby enters into conspiratorial relationship with the speaker:

The smutty joke was originally directed against the woman and is comparable to an attempt at seduction. If a man tells or

listens to obscene jokes in male society, the original situation, which cannot be realised on account of social inhibitions, is thereby also represented. Whoever laughs at a smutty joke does the same as the spectator who laughs at sexual aggression.³⁸

Freud thought that the telling of obscene jokes originated as a cultivated substitution for a more basic situation, in which a man might wish his crudely sexual language towards a woman to be overheard by another man. If, in this situation, the woman refused the man's advances, he might relieve his hostility towards her, simply by assuming that another man, who witnessed his frustration, would take pleasure in the overtly sexual content of his speech. This witness is thus converted from an intruder and potential rival to a "confederate . . . who as a listener is fascinated by the easy gratification of his libido."³⁹ Freud's hypotheses fit rather neatly with respect to the situations that Donne constructs in many of his erotic poems. They suggest, for example, a psychological motivation for the imaginative scenario of "Elegie XIX" ("To his Mistress Going to Bed"). Here, a woman must be assumed to be present as the speaker coaxes her to undress. And yet the whole performance is obviously intended to delight a male reader, and at one point the speaker seems to direct his words at *him*, rather than at the woman to whom they are supposedly addressed:

For lay-men, are all women thus array'd.
 Themselves are mystick books which only wee
 (Whom their imputed grace will dignifie)
 Must see reveal'd.

(40-43)

Later in his life, Donne would come to regret his ungovernable faculty for making unseemly word-associations:

³⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious* trans. A.A. Brill (New York: Dover, 1993) pp. 139-40.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.145.

Nay, even the Prophet *Hosea's spiritus fornicationum*, enters into me, *The spirit of fornication*, that is, some remembrance of the wantonnesse of my youth, some mis-interpretation of a word in prayer, that may bear an ill sense.⁴⁰

These, however, are the words of the pious Dean of St. Paul's. Several years earlier (from about the time of his ordination in 1615) Donne composed his *Holy Sonnets*. In these he certainly did not suppress what he now calls "*The spirit of fornication*." In "Holy Sonnet XVIII," the first line, "Show me deare Christ, thy Spouse so bright and clear," is subsequently transformed in a spirit wholly in keeping with the "wantonnesse" of Donne's youth: "Betray kind husband thy spouse to our sights" (11). The final couplet extends the conceit in order to praise the tolerance of the Protestant Church: "Who is most trew and pleasing to thee, then / When she's embraced and open to most men." One wonders what George Herbert would have thought of this.

The blasphemous punning to which Donne confesses in his sermon, and which surfaces in the final conceit of "Holy Sonnet XVIII" is of the kind that we would term "Freudian." Freud, of course, recognised punning and word-play as an expression of unconscious wishes. Yet we need not look to Freud for an awareness that the mind throws up associations which resist conscious control. Wit, the discoverer of correspondences, tended during the Renaissance to be seen as a deep, inborn and natural faculty. Sidney, as we have seen, describes "Invention, Natures child" as a faculty at odds with the conscious supervision of "Stepdame study." In Carew's elegy, Donne's "phansie" is both "a Mine" and a teeming, original womb, "rich and pregnant." For Hobbes the wayward associations of the mind occur "as in a Dream."

It must be recognised, however, that Hobbes's account of the psychological mechanism that triggers associations is, in one important respect, at variance with the idea of wit as it was understood by the most idealistic Renaissance critics and

⁴⁰ John Donne, *The Sermons of John Donne* ed. George Potter and Evelyn Simpson X vols. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1953) vol.X, p.56. Hereafter cited as *Sermons*.

theorists. For Hobbes the mind is originally a *tabula rasa*, and everything within it must therefore derive from sense-impressions. This means that for him the associations that occur to us have not been invented by any faculty present in the mind, but are merely the result of external relationships that have at some time appeared to the senses. For Sidney, by contrast, the poet's wit is a power comparable with the creativeness of God, and is capable of assembling an ideal world far surpassing the products of fallen nature.⁴¹ The latter view reached its apotheosis in the work of certain Italian and Spanish literary theorists who wrote at much the same time as Hobbes was at work on *Leviathan*. According to these theorists, not only was the poet comparable with God, described as a "witty creator,"⁴² but the world itself was a divine poem. For the Spaniard Emmanuele Tesauro, "God created a world full of metaphors, analogies and conceits, and so far from being ornamentation, they are the law by which creation was effected."⁴³ Thus, for Tesauro the poet gifted with the ability to find occult resemblances was not merely creating, but discovering them by virtue of the divine spark infused in him by the poet-God.

It is thus apparent that a rift was opening up between two completely different evaluations of the associative faculty, and that rift necessarily affected the nature and worth of the occult resemblances established in metaphysical conceits. According to the Hobbesian view, associations were attributable purely to empirical causes. According to Tesauro, however, wit was an *innate* associative faculty that was also divine, since it enabled the poet to discover resemblances that were present in the mind of God. The metaphysical conceit obviously relates to the latter view; and this is not surprising, as Donne was an avid reader of Spanish literature and must have had some acquaintance with the kind of poetry that Tesauro was retrospectively defending. (Donne's "Satyre I" mentions "Giddie fantastique poets of each land" [10].) He seems, moreover, to have derived some of his

⁴¹ See Sir Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry* ed. Jan Van Dornsten (London: Oxford University Press, 1966) pp. 24-25.

⁴² Joseph A. Mazzeo, *Renaissance and Seventeenth Century Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964) p.53.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 53

more far-fetched conceits - the compasses of "A Valediction forbidding mourning," for example - from poets of the Italian High Renaissance.⁴⁴ But in an England that was moving towards empiricism, Donne's conceits were on the point of losing their validity. It would soon be absurd to allege that two lovers are essentially one because of their supposed resemblance to a pair of compasses, just as it would be absurd to attach any importance to alchemy, or to the belief in guardian angels. Indeed, many of the diverse notions by which Donne clung to the ideal of connection - even if only by the expedient of citing them as poetic imagery - were withering under the scrutiny of men like Bacon and Hobbes.

⁴⁴ See Donald Guss, *John Donne, Petrarchist* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1966) p.74. for a precursor of Donne's compasses in a poem by Guarini (1538-1612).

2. DONNE AND FORMALIST POETICS

I suggested in the previous chapter that Donne is a poet whose need, as he puts it, to “deliver myself over in writing” cannot begin to find expression unless he knows or imagines himself to be addressing another. Thought itself would be impossible, he tells his friend Wotton, without the activity of letter-writing: “But for these / I could ideate nothing.” The statement is of course typical of Donne’s fondness for overstatement and meant, quite openly, to flatter his correspondent. Nevertheless, something akin to a theory emerges from high-flown compliments of this nature. Without the addressee Donne is inarticulate, even - as he sometimes prone to imagine - non-existent. We have noted Donne’s protestation to Christopher Brooke that “’tis nothing” to be “I”; and the same condition - nothingness - is extended to the separated addresser and addressee in “A Valediction of weeping”: “thou and I are nothing then, when on a divers shore” (9). Donne may not quite go so far as to announce “the death of the author”; but he often indicates that the reader or addressee has a complementary and creative function. In a verse letter “To E. of D. [the Earl of Dorset] with six holy Sonnets,” Donne writes:

I choose your judgement, which the same degree
Doth with her sister, your invention, hold,
As fire these drossie Rymes to purifie,
Or as Elixir, to change them to gold;
You are that Alchemist which alwaies had
Wit, whose one spark could make good things of bad.
(9-14)

I have suggested, also, that so high a valuation of the addressee is something of a paradox in a writer who tends often to seem self-involved. But in one respect Donne’s urge towards self-articulation and his conscious need for an addressee may be taken as an insight rather than a paradox. His fondness, in prose and verse letters, for stressing the creative role of his correspondents is consistent with an understanding of the social nature of discourse not formulated as theory until the early

twentieth century. According to Mikhail Bakhtin we cannot conceive a word - nor even an idea - that is not already marked by an intention to communicate: "verbal discourse is a social phenomenon - social throughout its entire nature and in each and every of its factors, from the sound image to the furthest reaches of abstract meaning."¹ Obviously, for Bakhtin, we "could ideate nothing" if our thoughts had not already a social context. Other Russian formalists, following Bakhtin's lead, suppose a deep connection between speaking and listening, such that a wish to speak is inherently a response. As his disciple Volosinov states, "the real unit of language that is implemented in speech . . . is not the individual, isolated monologic utterance but the interaction of at least two utterances - in a word dialogue."² We should, however, be cautious about reforming Donne into an apologist for socialist linguistics. There remains the fact of Donne's egotism, displeasing as it may be for some readers, though often censured without due allowance for its theatricality. As Carey puts it: "Donne's 'I' and 'me' are unusually stubborn pronouns, and will not allow the reader to appropriate them."³ Communication and dialogue are evidently ideals for Donne, but what we usually get from him is persuasion. In "Elegie XIV" ("On his Mistris"), it is "my words masculine persuasive force" that brings the woman to respond to her importunate lover. Such an understanding of the function of words stands in marked contrast to the "dialogue of one" which Donne describes in "The Exstasy," and hopes to achieve through his letter-writing to Goodyer. The difference is quite evidently aligned, in Donne's imagination, with two opposing attitudes to love which are still contained in that ambiguous word. Sex - or love - figures prominently as a source of comparison, whether Donne is trying to communicate or to persuade. "Sir, more than kisses, letters mingle souls," begins his verse letter "To Sir Henry Wotton." Sexual or social, the contest between dominance and reciprocity is one which Donne never

¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994) p.259.

² V.N. Volosinov, "Reported Speech" in *Readings in Russian Poetics* ed. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska (Cambridge U.S.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1971) (pp.149-77) p.150.

³ Carey, p.67.

seems to resolve. As Carey puts it: "His insistence that 'no man is an island', taken together with the egotism of his writing, illustrate (*sic*) both his urge to blend and the inescapable selfhood which prompted and frustrated it."⁴ Nevertheless, it diminishes Donne if we take the feeling of authorship that he conveys to arise solely from some kind of neurosis. Actually, as I will show, the effect derives to large extent from the close relationship, in his work, between prosody and idiomatic speech patterns. Viewed in this light, the stamp of definite authorship is less a symptom of Donne's personal confusion, than an artistic breakthrough.

For Bakhtin, as we have noted, the addressee - considered pluralistically as the social component in language - is vital to the production of any utterance. It needs, however, to be recognised that Bakhtin's emphasis on the social formation of language arose originally as a criticism of the monological and, in his opinion, potentially totalitarian view of language that he found in early Russian Formalism. Totalitarian language is monological in that it transmits a uniform ideology while denying the opportunity to answer back. I do not wish to over-emphasise the potential for seeing Donne in terms of this kind of language. Indeed, much of this thesis will be taken up with showing just how various and unstable are the ideological attitudes that Donne conveys. Moreover, though it cannot be denied that persuasion, and even coercion, figure prominently in Donne, we must, in his case, beware of confusing rhetorical forms and techniques with content. What I have designated "persuasion" might be better expressed as an impulse to monopolise meaning; that is to say, a desire to mean as much as possible, even at the risk of self-contradiction.

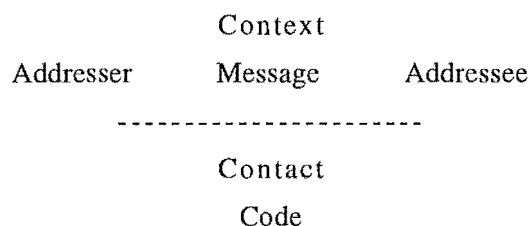
I propose to introduce, at this point, a linguistic model that I have found useful as means of analysing Donne's monopoly of meaning. The model, developed by Roman Jakobson, is tersely elucidated in his late essay "Linguistics and poetics," which is my point of departure here. It will be seen that Jakobsen attempts to isolate the factors which enable a speaker ("*addresser*") to convey meaning, intention or emotion satisfactorily to an addressee.

⁴ Carey, p.279.

Jakobson certainly does not overlook the role of the addressee in this process, but his basic premise is monological: "The ADDRESSER sends a MESSAGE to the ADDRESSEE."⁵ In addition to the *addresser*, the *message* and the *addressee*, Jakobson lists three further factors, whose significance I shall elaborate in the course of my analysis: *contact*, *context* and *code*. Taken in conjunction with Donne's work, Jakobson's factors seem designed to enable the speaker to remain firmly in control. This is hardly surprising, since these factors bear some resemblance to the areas in which the student of classical rhetoric was taught to be conscious: "the person who speaks, to whom he speaks, of whom or what, in respect to the time, the place, the purpose."⁶

I should mention, before I proceed any further, that Jakobson aims to distinguish between verbal messages according to the relative importance of the six factors. Thus, in practically any message, all factors operate, and their hierarchical arrangement determines the character of the message. His purpose in "Linguistics and poetics" is to define poetic language as a hierarchy of factors in which the message itself is uppermost.

Here, then, is Jakobson's model:



An utterance which is "oriented toward the first person"⁷ - that is, in which the addresser is uppermost in the hierarchy - is, in Jakobson's terminology, "emotive."⁸ This quality is most obvious in short interjections such as "*Tut! Tut!*"⁹ which, dispensing with lexical terms, express the speaker's attitude through a sound-

⁵ Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics" in *Modern Criticism and Theory* ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 1988) (pp.32-57) p.35. Hereafter cited as Jakobson.

⁶ Tuve, op. cit. p.192. These categories of classical rhetoric are those on which Puttenham bases his discussion of decorum.

⁷ Jakobson, p.38.

⁸ Jakobson, p.35.

⁹ Jakobson, p.35.

pattern. Expressions of this nature occur quite frequently in Donne: for example, "So, so, break of this last lamenting kisse" ("The Expiration," 1); "oh, oh / Nurse, ô my love is slaine" ("Elegie XVI," 51-52); and "Alas, alas, who's injured by my love?" ("The Canonization," 10). Since in these the sound-pattern is repetitious, expressions that repeat sounds having a more definite lexical value may be included here: as, for example, the refrain of *The First Anniversary* ("Shee, shee is dead; shee's dead"). "O" and "alas" are of course poetic *clichés*, though Donne's occasional positioning of "O" on a stressed syllable is both expressive and unusual for the period. Nor is Donne entirely original in his emotive use of repetition. There is at least one precedent in Sidney: "I, I, O I may say, that she is mine" (A&S 69, 11). But this is untypical and disturbs, with calculated effect, Sidney's usual smoothness. Such expressions are much less disruptive in Donne; they are merely the most obvious symptoms of a general tendency to mimic speech.

How did such emotive and colloquial expressions find their way into Donne's writing? I have pointed to Sidney as precursor; another is Wyatt. Both are now usually cited in order to diminish Donne's originality in this respect. But the most prolific use of such expressions in any area of Renaissance literary production must surely be found in drama. In no other literary medium would it have been normal to find such expressions as "Tut, tut!"¹⁰ or "Fie upon't! Foh!"¹¹ Thus, not only is Donne's colloquialism the most evident sign of speech-mimicry, but a clue pointing to the possibility that this mimicry owes much to contemporary drama. The cross-fertilisation is doubtless not clear-cut. We know, however, that Donne was "a great frequenter of Playes"¹²; that he was for a time Master of Revels at Lincoln's Inn; and that the revels of the Inns might include plays (*Twelfth Night* was performed in the hall of the Middle Temple in 1602). Obviously, Donne had plenty of opportunity to come into contact

¹⁰ William Shakespeare, *Richard II* ed. Peter Ure 4th. ed. (London: Methuen, 1956) II.iii.86.

¹¹ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1992) III.i.617.

¹² From a description of Donne by Sir Richard Baker in his *Chronicle of the Kings of England* (1643). See Bald, p.72.

with drama, "the most vital of contemporary arts."¹³ Moreover, the poems which can confidently be dated to the Inns of Court years are marked by a tendency to absorb and burlesque existing styles and genres. The "Epithalamion made at Lincoln's Inn," for example, mimics the hexameter refrains of Spenser's *Epithalamion*, but replaces Spenser's classicism with worldly and erotic detail.

There remains the objection that the low diction permissible in verse-satire could account for Donne's colloquialisms. Nevertheless, since either Donne or Joseph Hall is thought to be the first to have converted the Latin satire to an English genre, we may assume that the task of finding an English equivalent for the supposed roughness of the Latin models was to some extent carried out by Donne. Since it is absurd to think that Donne simply invented the language of his *Satyres*, we must ask whence he derived it. Drama must have presented itself as an obvious model: not least because of the then current belief that satire was originally a form of comedy. This mistake was based on an etymological confusion of the Latin *satira* with the Greek satyr-play. Thus, in his account of the genre, Puttenham states that "the *Satyre* was pronounced by rustical and naked *Sylvanes* speaking out of a bush";¹⁴ and he goes on to place "*Satyre*" among "ye foure sundry formes of Poesie *Drammatic* reprehensive . . . *Satyre*, old *Comedie*, new *Comedie*, and *Tragedie*."¹⁵ Moreover, Elizabethans who read the satires of Horace, Juvenal and Persius may have assumed some connection between Roman satire and drama, rather as they assumed that the closet dramas of Seneca were actually intended for the stage. Roman satires often include passages consisting of alternating speeches, and these speeches are not always separated by narrative interjections such as, "I said," or, "He replied." Several of Donne's *Satyres* incorporate blocks of dialogue, in which alternating speeches cut across the pentameter lines, just as they often do in verse-drama. It must be remembered, however, that while Roman satire provided Donne with a precedent for this, it could not supply him with

¹³ Bald, p.73.

¹⁴ Puttenham, p.49.

¹⁵ Puttenham, p.49.

appropriate contemporary diction or meter. For these he had a model close to hand.

The connection that I am seeking to establish between Donne and drama may be further elaborated with reference to Jakobson. When Jakobson wishes to demonstrate that the emotive function of language can be present in any utterance, he cites the ability of an actor, trained in the Moscow Theatre, to invest a simple, everyday phrase with a considerable variety of nuances.¹⁶ Now, by comparison with modern, realist scripts, the plays of Marlowe or Shakespeare are capable, to a much greater extent, of conveying appropriate emotion merely by being read aloud. When Hamlet coaches the players he certainly does not advocate the Stanislavsky Method; rather, he insists on clean, moderate elocution. Even a passionate speech is to be delivered with "a temperance that may give it smoothness" (III. ii. 9-10).

Donne is extremely skilful in his use - and even distortion - of metrical stress to convey the speaker's emotional attitude. His choice of diction is obviously important in this respect. Indeed, the interplay of these two factors - diction and meter - substitutes for the expressive distortion of words that is characteristic of everyday speech. Such distortion is, to give Jakobson's example, apparent in the expressive prolongation of the word "big."¹⁷ Likewise, the expressiveness of Donne's speaker is often a matter of the time he takes to say something; but with Donne the effect is inherent in the poetic technique, and would be apparent even in the most inexpressive reading:

To what a combersome unwieldinesse,
And burdenous corpulence my love had growne,
(*"Loves diet"* 1-2)

Subtle transitions in the speaker's state of mind may be marked by an alteration in *tempo*:

¹⁶ See Jakobson, p.56.

¹⁷ Jakobson, p. 35.

I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I
 Did, till we lov'd? were we not wean'd till then?
 ("The good-morrow," 1-2)

Donne's rhetorical punctuation emphasises the need for a slower delivery at the middle of this statement, thus helping to impart a certain tender deliberation to the words "thou, and I." Moreover, his idiosyncratic stanza forms may be seen as an extension of this kind of punctuation; indeed, they are to some extent its formal equivalent. The first stanza of "The Canonization" is an especially successful example of the use of rhyme and meter as a form of rhetorical punctuation:

For Godsake hold your tongue, and let me love,
 Or chide my palsie, or my gout,
 My five gray haire, or ruin'd fortune flout,
 (1-3)

At times Donne's stanza forms have obviously forced him to accept awkward enjambments, annoying parentheses and ambiguous grammar; and at such times one is apt to think they have no purpose beyond the display of mental ingenuity. But to my knowledge no critic, with the exception of Pierre Legouis, has reached the conclusion that such faults arise because Donne composed his initial stanzas in the manner of free verse, and then forced himself to repeat the same scheme throughout. In an analysis that focuses on the *Songs and Sonnets*, Legouis points out that the first stanza is often the most free-flowing¹⁸; that "the number of stanzas in each piece is in the inverse ratio to the length and complexity of the stanza-form"¹⁹; and that three poems in the set - "Womans Constancy," "The Apparition," and "The Dissolution" - consist of a single, irregular stanza.²⁰

My suggestion that Donne's irregular metrical schemes are an extension of his rhetorical punctuation - and hence consistent with his poetic mimicry of speech - must be defended against a

¹⁸See Pierre Legouis, *Donne the Craftsman: An Essay upon the Structure of the Songs and Sonnets* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962) p.29.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.26.

²⁰ Ibid., p.27

serious objection. It cannot be denied that Donne's interspersed bisyllabic and trisyllabic lines are a feature that his poetry has in common with song lyrics. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Donne was ever seriously interested in writing poetry that would be apt for musical setting. It is true that three of the *Songs and Sonets* - the "Song" ("Sweetest love, I do not go"), "The Message," and "The Bait" - are described in one manuscript as "Songs which were made to certain ayres which were made before"²¹ But of these Mazzaro notes that "none shows any real ease of phrasing."²² He goes on to observe that the "The Message" has too much variety of emotional tone for it to have been appropriate to set all of its stanzas to the same music. Similarly, in the "Song," he notes that "logical development forestalls emotional congruence."²³ Three of the *Songs and Sonets* - "Lovers infiniteness," "The Expiration" and "The Anniversarie" - were published in musical settings during Donne's lifetime; but of these the former two had to be modified, presumably because their essentially *spoken* rhythms posed difficulties for the composers. "I sing not, Siren like, to tempt; for I / Am harsh," Donne explains in a verse letter "To Mr S. B." (9-10). "The Triple Foole" suggests that Donne actually resented having his lyrics set to music, and the same poem may also be taken to reveal Donne's attitude to his self-imposed metrical problems. Here, "Rimes vexation" (11) is said to be cathartic, serving no purpose but to divert the speaker's attention from the pangs of love. This purpose is thwarted when the speaker hears poetic "Grief" (10) set to music. We need not take these claims literally; but there is here a strong suggestion that "Rimes vexation" had little to do with furnishing song lyrics. The suggestion is confirmed towards the end of the poem:

To Love, and Griefe tribute of Verse belongs,
But not of such as pleases when 'tis read,
Both are increased by such songs:
For both their triumphs so are published,
(17-20)

²¹See Jerome Mazzaro, *Transformations in the Renaissance English Lyric* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970) p.156.

²² Ibid., p.156.

²³ Ibid., pp.156-57.

The meaning of this is plain enough, despite the awkward transition from "read" to "songs." Verse that charms the ear is also that which is most suitable for musical setting. Donne wishes to safeguard his own poetry against either possibility, and we may deduce that his intention is to be selective about his audience. The word "published" is significant in this respect. With the exception of the *Anniversaries*, the only poems by Donne to be published in any form during his lifetime are those that were published as song-lyrics. As a gentleman-writer, Donne preferred to have his poetry distributed in manuscript. Musical setting of his lyrics could result in their dissemination to an audience that was wider and less select than the *coterie* readers who obtained them in manuscript form. In "The triple Foole," Donne describes song as "verse" "delighting many" (15-16). I conclude, then, that Donne's decision not to "sing . . . Siren like" is a decision not to "sing" for the "many," but to *speak* to the privileged few.

Thus far I have shown that Donne's style is, for its time, unusually close to the spoken voice. This tends to make his speaker persuasive at a very basic level; for as Jakobson observes, the emotive content of speech is effective "whether true or feigned."²⁴ Moreover, Donne's idiomatic speech keeps us aware that we are listening to *a* speaker, whose singularity tends to presuppose *an* addressee. His is not the formal, public voice of, for example, Spenser; though it is public to the extent that - as with his verse letters - there is clearly an intention to be *overheard*.

Jakobson states that poetry which is oriented towards the addressee "is imbued with the conative function and is either supplicatory or exhortative, depending on whether the first person is subordinated to the second one or the second to the first."²⁵ Donne's secular poetry is for the most part unambiguously exhortative. Imperatives abound in his work: "Enter these arms" ("The Dreame," 9); "Unpin that spangled breast plate," ("Elegie XIX," 7). Even when he adopts a supplicatory pose, he tends not to stay on his knees for long. The speaker of "Elegie

²⁴ Jakobson, p.35

²⁵ Jakobson, p.38

XVI," for example, is reduced - perhaps by exasperation - to say "I calmly beg" (7). But before long he has resumed his usual tone: "Thou shalt not" (12). Indeed it is a favourite ploy of Donne's to begin from a position of subjection which is gradually adjusted to one of triumph, without any real alteration in the facts of his situation. Even his religious poetry, which may be termed supplicatory, is markedly vehement. Five of the nineteen *Holy Sonnets* begin with an imperative; and, as always, the speaker is conscious of having arguments on his side: "Thou hast made me'and shall thy work decay?" ("Holy Sonnet I,"1). The imperative is a persuasive form, since, as Jakobson observes, it is "not liable to a truth test."²⁶ This is because an imperative sentence cannot be converted to an interrogative.

The term *context* is Jakobson's preferred alternative to the more current "referent."²⁷ Donne likes to select a mobile context, one which is changing even as he speaks. Such is the case with "The Sunne Rising," and "The Blossome." In these poems the fugitive nature of the situation propels the speaker's running commentary. Such narration, however, rarely lapses into the indicative mood,²⁸ which relates to the grammatical third person. Instead, it tends to be derived from a succession of vocatives, imperatives or interrogatives, and consequently achieves the vitality of a continuous address ("The Sunne Rising" is a *tour de force* in this respect). Jakobson states that epic poetry is "focused on the third person [and] strongly involves the referential function of language."²⁹ In poems such as "The Sunne Rising," Donne is to some extent adapting epic narration to the purposes of the lyric,³⁰ which according to Jakobson, "is oriented towards the first person [and] intimately linked with the emotive function."³¹ Yet Donne's frequent use of vocatives and imperatives also relates his poetry to the second person. The

²⁶ Jakobson, p.36.

²⁷ Jakobson, p.35.

²⁸ Donne's avoidance of the indicative mood is noted in Carey, p.118.

²⁹ Jakobson, p.38.

³⁰ The adaptation will be discussed in my fourth chapter, in which I deal with Donne's debt to the narrative techniques of Ovid.

³¹ Jakobson, p.38.

resulting dual focus is perhaps symptomatic of Donne's need for an addressee and his need for self-articulation.

In normal messages the context - that to which the words refer - is intended by the addresser to be decoded by the addressee.³² This depends on their having a common *code*, a term which comprehends ideas of idiom, vocabulary and register. By means of a common code, the addressee can contextualise the message in accordance with the speaker's intentions. Decoding, however, is restricted by Donne to an initiate. Such an addressee is, moreover, assumed by Donne to be in full agreement with the speaker. If male, he is generally to be identified with the reader and is often denoted by the pronoun "we." This pronoun often denotes a male reader in poems which supposedly address a woman, and is to be associated with Donne's consciousness of addressing a coterie audience, largely made up of male friends. If, however, the confidential addressee is female, then she entirely reciprocates the speaker's affections. Her assumed complaisance is (as with the like-minded male) represented as perfect phatic communion. She and the speaker are "one world" ("The good-morrow," 14), and speak "the same" ("The Exstasy," 26). Donne's treatment of these like-minded addressees is balanced by an opposing but obviously related tendency. His poems are elitist, often openly dismissive of those unfit to be addressed: such are the "lay men" of "Elegie XIX" (39), and the "prophane men" of "The undertaking" (22). The contrast which Donne implies between initiates who respond to his verse, and outsiders who cannot, may be taken as an awareness, on his part, that he appeals to a select and limited readership. "Rare poems ask rare friends," as Jonson puts it in a poem sent, along with Donne's *Satyres*, to the Countess of Bedford ("To Lucy, Countesse of Bedford, with Mr. Donne's Satyres," 6).³³

But Donne does not invariably dismiss those who would resist what he has to say. Often, in fact, he uses an antagonist to whom the whole poem is conceived as a response. When the addressee is not the speaker's ally, but an opponent whom he wishes to persuade, then the speaker withholds and defers full access by

³² Jakobson, p.35.

³³ Cited in Patrides, p.398.

the addressee to the context. Essentially, he uses the displacement of one metaphor or conceit by another to maintain this deferral. For instance, in "A Valediction forbidding mourning" the tenor or referent "parting" is never once expressed openly: the addressee is persuaded not to mourn by a series of implicit metaphors. Relevant here is Jakobson's insight that poetic language employs a process which is the reverse of *metalanguage*.³⁴ Metalanguage usually reinforces the common code, so that both parties can understand one another. In this, it frequently resorts to synonymy.³⁵ If, in his seduction poem, "The Flea," Donne had wished to employ synonymy to clarify the nature of a flea, then his speaker might have said "it is a small animal that bites." And if the addressee still failed to understand, then he would have added, "a parasite," "a bloodsucker," and so on. This, however, would clearly be contrary to his purpose, which depends on the addressee's being denied the normal meaning of the referent "flea." Thus, instead, the speaker maintains that the flea, though insignificant, contains "our two bloods" (4); that it is "our marriage bed, and marriage temple" (13), and so on. We see, then, that in poetic language - and Donne's in particular - synonymy is persuasive rather than informative. It is also primary and generative rather than supplementary as it is in normal messages. Its aim is to extend the message rather than to conclude it; and the difference lies between an intention to reach agreement, and an intention to maintain conflict.

Metaphor has the peculiar charm of making us grant a correspondency even before we have understood it. Simile is by its nature more honest and less effective in this respect. Donne vastly prefers metaphor, and his preference is clearly related to the purpose of persuasion: "This flea *is* you and I" (12: my italics). The preference is a feature of metaphysical poetry as a whole, with its compact "strong lines" and tendency towards *catachresis*. Metaphysical poetry has long been recognised as having, in effect, a technique for extending what Jakobson terms "the metaphoric pole." Samuel Johnson's well-known assessment

³⁴ See Jakobson, p. 39.

³⁵ Cf. Jakobson, "The metaphoric and metonymic poles" in Lodge, op. cit. p.58.

of metaphysical poetry from "The Life of Cowley" shows that he considers this extension to be excessive: "The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions."³⁶ Thus metaphysical poetry enlarges the vocabulary of *poetic* persuasion.

The term *contact* denotes the physical space or other connection permitting the message to pass from the addresser to the addressee. Donne often sketches a location - a *topos*, in its original sense - in which he places his speaker. The addressee is often, though not always included in the space of contact. Donne distributes, with great economy, a few props which will serve as useful points of reference. These will usually become the referents or, to use literary terminology, the "tenors" on which he will expand figuratively. Thus "The Exstasy" begins:

Where, like a pillow on a bed,
A Pregnant banke swel'd up, to rest
The violets reclining head,

By laying this groundwork Donne puts his speaker in a position, later in the poem, to persuade the female addressee to "be fruitful and multiply":

A single violet transplant,
The strength, the colour, and the size
(All, which before was poore, and scant,)
Redoubles still, and multiplies.

(37-40)

Donne's meditations are often "local" in this manner. By contrast, when Shakespeare begins Sonnet 12 ("When I do count the clock that tells the time"),³⁷ it is already apparent that his speaker and the clock are not located together in time and space. This tactic

³⁶ Samuel Johnson, "The Life of Cowley" in *The Metaphysical Poets* ed. Gerald Hammond p.51.

³⁷ All quotations from Shakespeare's *Sonnets* taken from *The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint* by William Shakespeare ed. John Kerrigan (London: Penguin, 1986)

helps Shakespeare's meditations to take on a universal character. When, however, the speaker of Donne's "The Blossome" begins with "Little think'st thou poore flower," we must suppose that the flower is within his sight *as he speaks*. This forces Donne to resort to great ingenuity in developing the flower's role as none other than his addressee. Donne's decision to restrict his speaker in this way creates a need to manipulate the space of contact so that it will be emblematic of the speaker's condition, and Donne is at his most virtuosic when the speaker's location does not seem to answer this requirement, as is the case with "Twicknam Garden." Generally, however, Donne ensures that the odds are in his favour, and this may be seen in his choice of the time, as well as the space in which he speaks. A nocturnal setting, for example, provides ready-made metaphors for certain emotional states. The same is true of the morning of the *aubades*, or the noon of "A Lecture upon the shadow."

The meaning of the term *code* has already been given. There is an astonishing variety of codes in Donne's poetry: cryptic messages, legal documents, messages from the grave, songs, letters, the language of flowers, eye-contact, and prayer. He clearly has an obsession with communication, though, as we have seen, his words remain "my words," whatever his need to share them. Thus, for Donne, the choice of code must remain in the speaker's control. I have shown already that Donne vacillates between an ideal of phatic communion and a determination not to be understood by any but the initiate. Formalist analysis suggests that not only must all speech have an addressee - a social destination - but a social origin. Accordingly, all discourse is circular. Donne's, however, is (if one chooses to believe him) resolutely linear.

3. THE PETRARCHAN ADDRESSEE

So far, we have seen Donne expressing complete identification with a male addressee, and confessing that he uses letter-writing as an opportunity for self-articulation. Given the exclusively male environment of the Inns of Court, it is likely that the friendships Donne formed in his youth were more genuinely reciprocal than any of his early relationships with women. The furtive womanising of the *Elegies* - which, like the *Satyres*, are generally assigned to the 1590s - seems to bear out this assumption (though one must not overlook the fact that the *Elegies* are heavily influenced by Ovid's *Amores*). Thus, it may be that Donne, throughout most of the 1590s, had encountered nothing in his personal life that could induce him to transfer the kind of eulogy that Brooke receives in "The Storme" (1597) to a female addressee. The supposition is problematic because of the difficulty in dating most of the *Songs and Sonets*, some of which present physical love as providing the conditions for perfect mutual understanding. A further problem is that generic expectations affecting the depiction of women mean that we cannot take the female addressees of the more idealistic *Songs and Sonets* to signal a change in Donne's attitude. Parfitt cautions against making assumptions about Donne's attitude to women that fail to take into account the importance of genre:

In all these poems generic considerations play a part, and in every case such considerations militate against simple possibilities of sincerity. It is to be expected that Woman in epithalamia and funeral elegy will be praised for moral virtue, that Woman in erotic elegy will be praised for sexual attractiveness, and that Woman in satire will exemplify viciousness and depravity.¹

Parfitt goes on to argue that the idealistic depiction of women found, at times, in the *Songs and Sonets* is once again attributable to genre - in this case, the lyric. He accounts for the frequent absence of such idealism by asserting that "Donne is, in

¹ George Parfitt, *John Donne: A Literary Life*, p.149.

fact, developing an enigmatic mixed lyric tradition drawing praise and satire together in a way which reaches back to Wyatt.”²

Such considerations ought not to be ignored; but they go too far if they lead us to see Donne only as an innovative developer of literary influences. When Donne writes: “Sir, more than kisses, letters mingle souls,” he may be seen as a wit who combines aspects of the love-lyric with the verse letter. But the evidence in my first chapter suggests that the ideal of absolute mutual understanding was of great personal importance for Donne. Equally important was the ideal - however fitfully it appears - of mutuality in sexual love. Indeed, the two obsessions seem to collide in his imagination, as if he felt or wished them to be identical. In the letter to Goodyer from which I quoted in my first chapter, Donne borrows the central conceit of “The Extasy,” according to which lovers are able to converse as a single soul addressing itself reflexively. The transference raises a question of a kind which often arises from Donne’s figurative freedoms: is friendship “like” sexual love, or is sexual love “like” friendship? Certainly, Donne is dismissive of the idea of wasting his affection where there seems little hope of return, and this constitutes one of the major differences between the *Songs and Sonets* and a typical Petrarchan sequence. In a letter to one Bridget White, reproving her slackness in correspondence, Donne states: “For my part, I can love health enough, though I be never sick; and I never needed my Mistris frowns and disfavours to make her favours acceptable to me.”³ Here, clearly enough, is a rejection of the usual Petrarchan relationship between the poet and his mistress. Yet the Neoplatonic oneness of lovers to which Donne alludes in “The Exstasy,” and in his letters to Goodyer and Wootton, is a typically Petrarchan theme. Donne’s relationship to Petrarchism is clearly problematic: certain aspects of Petrarchism continue to shape his modes of the address, while others are rejected. My discussion of the relationship between

² Ibid., p.149.

³ Hester, p.3.

the speaker and the addressee in Donne's work must, accordingly, assess the extent of his debt to Petrarchism.

The *Canzoniere* of Petrarch provided the Renaissance lyric with its most typical speaker and addressee. In England, poets from Wyatt to such late traditionalists as Drayton fashioned their lyric protestations of love in imitation of Petrarch. Clearly, the Petrarchan need to articulate an erotic dilemma "in presence of that fayrest proud"⁴ was immensely productive of writing. Individual poems do not always address the lady directly. Caught up in his sense of isolation, the Petrarchist may invoke Venus, Cupid, or "love" itself to hear and bear witness to his sorrows; alternatively, he may apostrophise natural objects in imitation of Petrarch's extensive use of the pathetic fallacy. Often the first poem of a Petrarchan sequence requires the whole to be understood as intended for the lady's perusal. Such is the case with Spenser's sequence, *Amoretti*:

Happy, ye leaves! when as those lily hands,
Which hold my life in their dead-doing might,
Shall handle you, and hold in love's soft bands,
Lyke captives trembling at the victor's sight.
And happy lines! on which, with starry light,
Those lamping eyes will deign sometimes to look

(l. 1-6)

Likewise, in the first sonnet of *Astrophel and Stella*, Sidney indicates that Stella is to be the reader - and to that extent, the addressee - of the whole sequence. Yet in the sequences of both Sidney and Spenser the lady is addressed only intermittently. In the case of Sidney, the list of apostrophised figures is extremely diverse, including personified natural objects, mythological beings, inept poets, and critical or uncomprehending men. Moreover, "Stella" herself is, we are informed, no more than a cryptic substitution for the historical Lady Rich, who is in turn the "real" addressee of the sequence only if we accept literary mythology as biography.

⁴ Spenser, *Amoretti*, 2, 9. All quotations from Spenser's *Amoretti* are taken from *The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser* ed. J. Payne Collier 5 vols. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1891) vol.5

I am not suggesting that Spenser or Sidney would have made better poetry if they had spoken manfully to their respective ladies. Apostrophe was, according to its original rhetorical purpose, intended to give variety to public speeches. Puttenham defines the figure as "the turnaway or turnetale," and adds that it "breedeth by such exchange a certaine recreation in the mindes of the hearers, as this used by a lover to his mistresse."⁵ Nevertheless, it is impossible to read Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* as a continuous address to Stella, varied for her "recreation" by the use of apostrophe. The problem relates to the nature of the Petrarchan sequence, because here the conversion of a "private" utterance to a public performance must, above all, be sustained. Under these circumstances, the "recreation" sought through the use of apostrophe becomes detached from its fictional purpose and increasingly concerned with "the mindes of the hearers." At times even Donne, whose poetry seems to show a far greater readiness to address women directly, and whose *Songs and Sonets* cannot be conceived as a sequence, betrays confusion about the "real" addressee of the love-lyric. In "The triple Foole," Donne justifies "whining Poetry" (3) as a means of persuading a woman: "where's that wise man that would not be I / If she would not deny?" (4-5). But he soon forgets this purpose and settles on another: "I thought if I could draw my paines / Through Rimes vexation, I should them allay" (8-9). This, however, is but another pretence; for one cannot believe that Donne wrote merely for the sake of therapy and without any intention of engaging the interest of his readers.

For the remainder of this chapter I wish to examine the status of English Petrarchism at a time when Donne was establishing himself as a poet, and to analyse both the assimilation and rejection of Petrarchism in Donne's poetry. Throughout, I will draw attention to a growing awareness of Petrarchism's inappropriateness to a more realistic conception of the male speaker and female addressee.

An artistic movement that is widely imitated tends to become formulaic. Petrarchism gave tightly defined roles to the speaker and addressee of the lyric, and furnished *topoi*, conceits and

⁵ Puttenham, p.245.

tricks of figurative embellishment that could easily be standardised. Thus, Petrarchism carried the seeds of its own decline into *cliché* and became, as with anything that has become overly familiar, a perfect target for parody. By the late sixteenth century, even Sidney and Shakespeare, who drew extensively on the tradition, would occasionally signal its obsolescence. Thus Sidney, the “English Petrarke,”⁶ belies his own literary debt when, in his sonnet sequence *Astrophel and Stella*, the speaker Astrophel rejects the imitation of “Petrarch’s long deceased woes” (A&S, 15, 7). Astrophel’s suit to Stella is, supposedly, to be the faithful record of his own feelings, rather than a second-hand literary product (A&S, 1). Sidney was among the first to introduce the precepts of Aristotle’s *Poetics* into English Renaissance criticism.⁷ Downgrading subservience to literary models, he therefore identifies imitation with Aristotelian *mimesis*, which connotes the plausible representation of character as manifested by speech and action. Thus Astrophel seeks to articulate his woes according to the dictates of his “heart” (A&S, 1, 14); his task, therefore, is “[b]ut copying” (A&S, 3, 14). Though both declarations may relate to the Petrarchan conceit that the lady’s picture is located in the poet’s heart, they nevertheless represent the speaker’s final decision in two sonnets that seek to distinguish his suit from mere literary pastiche. Moreover, Sidney (or Astrophel) is responding to the situation of which he writes according to the rhetorical principle of *energia*, which requires the speaker to seem genuinely moved by the topic of the oration. In his treatise, *A Defence of Poetry*, Sidney decries the absence of *energia* in the lyrical poetry of his day, and links the deficiency with the derivativeness of his contemporaries. “[I]f I were a mistress,” he writes, such poets “would never persuade me they were in love: so coldly they apply fiery speeches, as men that had rather read lovers’ writings . . . than that in truth they feel

⁶ See David Kalstone ed., *The Selected Poetry and Prose of Sidney* (New York: Signet, 1970) intro. p.viii.

⁷ See Donald Lemen Clark, *Rhetoric and Poetry in the Renaissance* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963) p.83.

those passions, which easily . . . may be bewrayed by that same forcibleness or *energia* (as the Greeks call it) of the writer.”⁸

Clearly, then, the status of Petrarchism was already becoming problematic during the early 1580s, when Sidney wrote *Astrophel and Stella* and *A Defence of Poetry*.⁹ Even the “English Petrarke” was apparently dissatisfied with the conventional Petrarchan lyric, and was calling for a greater infusion of passion and realism: “Desire still cries, give me some food” (*A&S*, 71, 14) says Astrophel, expressing his need directly, without the Petrarchist’s ambiguous request for pity. Moreover, in *A Defence of Poetry*, Sidney requires the speaker of a love lyric to be swayed by the content of his speech. This, according to Sidney, will cause the speaker to be more persuasive than he would if he merely spoke by the book. It is evident, then, that Sidney’s plea for greater realism concerns not only the speaker of lyric poetry, but the imagined response of his female addressee. Sidney’s closely connected demands for realism, *energia*, and persuasiveness anticipate the qualities of Donne’s speaker, who characteristically responds within a specific situation and is forcefully rhetorical when he seeks to persuade. Another feature which Donne shares with Sidney is his tendency to distance his speaker from inexperienced literati who, as Donne puts it, “have no Mistresse but their Muse” (“Loves growth,” 12-13).

Further evidence of the complex state of English Petrarchism towards the end of the sixteenth century may be found in the comedies of Shakespeare. Both *Loves Labours Lost* and *As You Like It* contain characters who make themselves laughable by writing bad Petrarchan poetry. But a more subtle and sustained parody of the movement can be found in Shakespeare’s characterisation of the Italianate Duke Orsino in *Twelfth Night* (1601).¹⁰ This obdurate romantic is involved in a futile marriage-suit to the Countess Olivia. Throughout the play he

⁸ Sir Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry* ed. and intro. Jan Van Dorsten (London: Oxford University Press, 1966) pp.69-70. Hereafter cited as *A Defence*.

⁹ These works were first published in 1591 and 1595 respectively, and thus became generally available during Donne’s formative years as a poet.

¹⁰ All quotations taken from William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* ed. M.M. Mahood (London: Penguin, 1968)

expresses himself in language which is riddled with Petrarchan clichés and evokes only hard-headed contempt from the lady - and scepticism of his sincerity from the audience. Olivia's rejection - not only of the Duke's suit, but of the language by which it is expressed - is at times pointedly anti-Petrarchan. An obvious instance is her mocking treatment of the *blazon*, the figurative embellishment of woman's appearance which Petrarchism inherits from the poetry of Courtly Love. Olivia lists her features as though she were a clerk compiling an inventory: "item: two lips, indifferent red; item: two grey eyes, with lids to them; item: one neck, one chin, and so forth" (I.iv.236-7). This unglamorous prose blazon recalls the *anti-blazon* of Shakespeare's Sonnet 130 in its refusal to embellish normal attractiveness with what the sonnet terms 'false compare' (14). Donne himself supplies an example of the *anti-blazon* in one of his *Elegies*, "The Anagram"; though this poem has little in common with Shakespeare's "My mistress' eyes," as it describes a woman as improbably foul as the Petrarchan mistress is fair. Much closer to Olivia's itemisation is the dismissive reference to "eyes, lips, hands," which occurs in Donne's "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" (20). Here, the speaker declares the relative unimportance of such physical details to true lovers. Similarly, the speaker of Donne's "Aire and Angels" finds that "thy lip, eye, and brow" (14) are improper objects for the purity of his love, though he comes close to obscene bathos in declaring that "some fitter must be sought" (20).

As the *anti-blazon* shows, the Petrarchan tradition can be undermined as effectively by subversion as by scorn. The former is frequent in Donne. In "Loves Progresse," for example, he drags the Petrarchan and Neoplatonic ideal of the unity of pure lovers from its pedestal: "Perfection is in unitie: preferr / One woman first, and then one thing in her"(9-10). Here, as so often with Donne, the ribaldry is intellectual. The subversiveness of "Loves Progresse" points to a preference for Aristotelian teleology over Platonic idealism. Donne is suggesting that men do not find love's true nature in an ideal of love or woman but through coitus, the *telos* or "right true end of love."

Who ever loves, if he do not propose
 The right true end of love, he's one that goes
 To sea for nothing but to make him sick:

(1-3)

This description of the lover who ignores or endlessly defers sexual fulfilment has a direct counterpart in Feste's admonition to Orsino in *Twelfth Night*:

I would have men of such constancy put to sea, that their
 business might be everywhere, and their intent everywhere;
 for that's it that always makes a good voyage of nothing.

(II.

4. 77)

Orsino's fixation with Olivia is, like the language of his wooing, languorous and without a practical destination. It is also a partial falsification of his real character: an obsession by which he compensates for the temperamental instability which he imagines to be a symptom of love:

For such as I am, all true lovers are:
 Unstaid and skittish in all motions else,
 Save in the constant image of the creature
 That is beloved.

(II. 4. 17-20)

Again, a direct comparison may be drawn between Shakespeare and Donne. In "The Broken Heart," Donne suggests that the constancy which Orsino sees as the antidote to his skittishness is an insane fiction. Mental digressiveness is, in fact, normal, and rules out the possibility of being single-mindedly in love:

He is starke mad, who ever sayes,
 That he hath been in love an houre,
 Yet not that love so soone decayes,
 But that it can tenne in lesse space devour;

(1-4)

Thus, for Donne and for the Shakespeare of *Twelfth Night*, the fixity of Petrarchan devotion constitutes a falsification of the speaker's actual state of mind.

I have shown that, like Sidney, Shakespeare draws on Petrarchism but is simultaneously aware of its potential triteness, its lack of realism, and its possible failure to persuade. The close relationship of Donne's attitude to the movement with theirs, especially apparent in the case of Shakespeare, suggests that Donne's poetry arises from a sense of Petrarchism's shortcomings that was increasing among the most perceptive writers in the late sixteenth century. Petrarchism, as Shakespeare demonstrates in *Twelfth Night*, fits awkwardly into a realistic situation where the terms of refusal are dictated by the lady, and hence immune to witty interpretation by the Petrarchan lover.

Another factor underlying Donne's anti-Petrarchism is the critical attitude towards the Court which, as I noted in my first chapter, is connected with the writing of satires. Petrarchism, as a courtly mode of address, has often less to do with love than with a poet's shrewd sense of the need to curry favour in a suitably decorous manner. Thomas Wyatt, writing during the reign of Henry the Eighth, combines his frustrations as a courtier with those of the slighted lover. The grievance voiced in his poetry over receiving less than he has merited has thus a double significance. Wyatt was the first English translator of Petrarch, though his translations are often adaptations that convert Petrarch's delicate grief into Wyatt's own Stoic endurance in the face of hard fortune.

Under Elizabeth, English Petrarchism came to be closely aligned with the Court through her encouragement of courtiers to conceive their relationship with her in Petrarchan terms. Thus Raleigh, writing to Sir Robert Cecil in 1592, feigns heartbreak over the Queen's absence, and doubtless senses a check to his ambition:

My heart was never broken till this day that I hear the Queen goes away so far off, whom I have followed so many years with so great love and desire in so many journeys, and am now left behind her in a dark prison all alone. While she was near

at hand, that I might hear of her once in two or three days, my sorrows were the less, but yeven now my heart is cast into the depth of all misery. I that was wont to behold her riding like Alexander, hunting like Diana, walking like Venus, the gentle wind blowing her fair hair about her pure cheeks like a nymph, sometime sitting in the shade like a goddess, sometime singing like an angel, sometime playing like Orpheus - behold, the sorrow of this world once amiss hath bereaved me of all. Oh! love that only shineth in misfortune, what is become of my assurance! All wounds have scars but that of phantasy: all affections their relenting but that of woman kind.¹¹

Since the Queen was at this time, by Renaissance standards, a very old woman it is apparent that her national Petrarchan myth had degenerated into decadence and patent unreality.

Donne's *Satyres* date from about the time when Raleigh penned his love-lorn letter to Cecil. In "Satyre IV" Donne sees the strained elegance of courtly language as part of a cynical game:

The men board them; and praise; as they thinke, well,
 Their beauties; they the mens wits; Both are bought.
 (190-191)

Donne is not above playing this kind of game himself. In "Lovers infinitenesse" he seems to be the loser: "all my treasure, which should purchase thee, / Sighs, teares, and oathes, and letters I have spent" (5-6). Here, as in "Satyre IV," there is a strong suggestion of commerce, and the metaphor is extended into a contractual agreement: "no more can be due to me / Then at the bargain made was meant" (7-8).

It needs to be recognised that at precisely the time when Donne was writing his early poetry, England was in a decisive phase of transition from late feudalism, preserved anachronistically in the terminology of courtly Petrarchism, to a mercantile

¹¹ J.E. Neale, *Essays in Elizabethan History* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1958) pp.91-92.

economy. After the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, England ships could trade unopposed with the ports of the Netherlands, and there began a period of prosperity that persisted until the early years of James's reign. Accordingly, Donne's combination of Petrarchan motifs with metaphors deriving from commerce signals a collision between a courtly ideal, whose poetic mode of address had lost all connection with reality, and the new circumstances in which the poem was written and received. Thus, when Donne invites the reader of "Love's Progress" to follow his rejection of Petrarchan idealism, and to treat women cynically according to "our new nature (Use) the soul of trade" (16), he is evoking a complex reaction on the part a contemporary, a reaction composed of recollection (and possibly nostalgia), and the consciousness of living in a new and unprecedented world of unstable values.

The appeal of Donne's anti-Petrarchism to twentieth-century readers has tended to force his straightforward Petrarchism into the background. Donald Guss's study, *John Donne, Petrarchist*,¹² helps to remedy this oversight by revealing Petrarchan aspects of Donne's work which might remain unnoticed without a thorough knowledge of movement. Guss demonstrates that Petrarchism is not a fixed, but a diverse and developing tradition. One development which is highly relevant to Donne's work is the tactic, shown in the poems of "witty" Petrarchists such as Guarini and Serafino, of taking Petrarch's metaphors literally and using them as the basis for extended conceits. This is Donne's procedure in "The Apparition,"¹³ which begins with an outright statement of the Petrarchan commonplace that the lover dies because of his mistress' disdain, and proceeds to construct a situation suited to the speaker's invective.

The technique of building extended conceits from stock-Petrarchan premises creates an absurd logic which secures such poems against contradiction. They are hermetically sealed within their own "logical" processes, and within the perfect

¹² Donald Guss, *John Donne, Petrarchist* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1966). Hereafter cited as Guss.

¹³ For an extended discussion of the relevance of "witty" Petrarchism to "The Apparition," see Guss, op. cit. pp.53-60.

forms which these processes generate by their neat developments and antitheses. The lady could of course decline to play the game, but she could hardly do so unless she refused to read the poem. And she would be an ill-humoured lady if she so refused; for no lady, in these poets' estimation, can resist an elegant compliment. In any case, the "logic" of "witty" Petrarchism takes her participation in the game for an established fact. A good example of what I mean comes from a lyric in Gascoigne's "Certayne verses written to a Gentlewoman whome hee liked very wel."¹⁴ Here Gascoigne assumes, in the manner of the "witty" Petrarchists, that his lady's glances have literally the power granting of life or death:

Thus in thy lookes my love and life have hold,
And with such life my death drawes on a pace
(15-16)

Having thus established that his lady's "lookes" are fatal, Gascoigne goes on to deduce that she must provide the magical cure which will restore him to life. A well-worn Petrarchan oxymoron comes in useful here: since the lady's "lookes" are life and death to Gascoigne, it follows that only further eye-contact will revive him. The ambiguity of "thy lookes" (gaze/appearance) is a cunning twist: who does the looking? By this ambiguity, Gascoigne invokes the Petrarchan assumption that the woman's beauty causes the poet's death. In this he exploits another ambiguity - or, rather, logical fallacy - suggesting that she kills him intentionally. The lady must take this barb if she is to accept the compliment to her "lookes." Later I shall speak of the importance of eye-contact in Donne's work, and show how he elevates the kind of trivial flirtation described by Gascoigne to substantiate his most ardent statements of reciprocal love.

The value for Donne of "witty" Petrarchism lies largely in what it entitles him to say.¹⁵ In several of the *Songs and Sonets*

¹⁴ The last two stanzas of the poem are quoted in Guss, p.43.

¹⁵ Gascoigne describes such freedom in *Certayne notes of Instruction concerning the making of verse or rhyme in English*: "I would . . . find

the speaker takes the Petrarchan idea that the lover dies for love as an assumption that justifies what he will say throughout the poem. The assumption is often stated at the outset: thus, "The Damp" begins, "When I am dead"; "The Legacy," "When I died last"; and "The Apparition," "When by thy scorn, O murther, I am dead." In each of these poems the speaker's bitter invective and realistic *energia* seem plausible because an absurd premise has been taken for granted. In "The Apparition" this device of "witty" Petrarchism enables the speaker to monopolise an imaginary situation and to silence the lady. Here, Donne assumes that the woman's scorn has indeed caused his death. He will therefore be a ghost, and promises that he will come to her bedside and scare her speechless. She dares only to "pinch" (6) his sleeping rival in the hope that he will defend her. Further, the speaker promises to "tell" (14) her something which will increase her discomfort. But in order make the surprise more unpleasant he will not disclose the content of it "[l]est that preserve thee" (14). Donne ends the poem by assuring the woman that no pity can dissuade his intentions 'since my love is spent' (15). This is perfectly illogical, since the speaker is supposedly going to die of unrequited love. But "witty" Petrarchism needs only the trappings of logic. Donne's complete command of the situation in "The Apparition" ensures that, as Guss puts it, "the lady has nothing left to say."¹⁶

Petrarchanism is not always always as cunningly one-sided as in the last two examples from Gascoigne and Donne. Guss's study points to the diversity and dynamism of the movement, and one of the elements with which it fused is Italian Neoplatonism. The Italian Neoplatonists produced idealistic treatises on the nature of love. In these, their theorising blended with the work of Petrarch because of a supposition, born of reverence for the poet, that Petrarch had articulated a philosophy of love. One of their most important tenets was the two-in-oneness of lovers, a notion which derives ultimately from Plato's *Symposium*. Here, the comic playwright Aristophanes invents a bizarre aetiology to explain the nature of love. He explains that all human beings once

some supernatural cause whereby my penne might walke in the superlative degree" (cited in Guss, p.41).

¹⁶ Guss, p.58.

had two heads, along with twice the present complement of arms, legs and genitals. From the present two sexes, Aristophanes deduces an original combination yielding *three*: the purely (and doubly) male; the purely female (likewise double); and the hermaphrodite. It seems that these creatures were blissfully happy, and rather too powerful in the opinion of Zeus, who therefore sent Apollo to split each one in half. As result, says Aristophanes, we now have both male and female homosexuals and heterosexuals, all frantically seeking to be reunited with their "other half."¹⁷

The two-in-oneness of lovers is an extremely important theme for Donne; it crops up in practically all the poems which make confident pronouncements about reciprocal love. It is this theme, more than any other, which enables Donne's speaker to assume that his monologue perfectly expresses the thoughts of the female addressee, and the most remarkable and sustained form that this assumption takes is the "dialogue of one" from "The Exstasy."

I wish now to discuss another, somewhat less improbable basis on which the Petrarchism constructs a kind of reciprocity between the speaker and the addressee. This is the pretext of sophisticated and decorous compliment. Gascoigne heads one of his lyrics with the words "With these verses you shall judge the quicke capacitie of the ladie."¹⁸ I shall thus be dealing with poetry that flatters its addressee through an appeal to the addressee's wit.

Elizabethan poets were, in practice, in agreement with Bakhtin's idea that all discourse arises from a social context. These poets respond, often with extreme subtlety, to the presence of the reader (whom they tend to conflate with the addressee), and many a conceit is woven around his or her active participation in their texts. Shakespeare's Sonnet 26, for example, requires the addressee to be witty enough to understand his role in supplying what the poem supposedly lacks.

To thee I send this written ambassage
To witness duty, not to show my wit -

¹⁷ See Plato, *The Symposium* in *Dialogues of Plato* trans. Jowett ed. J.D. Kaplan (New York: Washington Square Press, 1950) pp.188-92.

¹⁸ See Guss, p.42.

Duty so great, which wit so poor as mine
 May make seem bare, in wanting words to show it,
 But that I hope some good conceit of thine
 In thy soul's thought, all naked, will bestow it

(3-8)

To us, such flattery may seem insincere. For one thing, it seems to embody a well-worn trick designed to deflect "inspired" praise back onto the poet. This is not a false supposition; but Elizabethan poets were well aware of the game they were playing and could on occasion be treat it with a kind of sly honesty. Shakespeare's Sonnet 39 is a case in point:

O, how thy worth with manners may I sing
 When thou art all the better part of me?
 What can mine own praise to mine own self bring,
 And what is't but mine own when I praise thee?

(1-4)

Here Shakespeare encodes a double assessment of the relationship between poet and addressee which generates praise. Stating as a premise the Petrarchan and Neoplatonic convention of the two-in-oneness of lovers, he asks whether it is possible to address his own "better part": whence should the praise derive in the first place? It seems, according to the convention he cites, that the process cannot begin if it is to have the requisite tact. But of course the process *does* begin; it begins by asking if it "may," thereby slyly assuming consent. Shakespeare goes on to weave a fine ambiguity centering on "mine own praise"; he thus proposes two solutions to the question of who gives, and who receives, praise, both of which are present, as potential readings, in line four. The first reading, uppermost if we assume the tone to be complimentary, states that the praise belongs to the beloved ("mine own") insofar as the convention is valid. The second treats the convention ironically, suggesting that the praise resides with the poet. This leads him to consent, in line five, to a separation which will enable the praise to pass in one direction from poet to addressee, as by rights it should:

Even for this let us divided live,
 And our dear love lose name of single one,
 That by this separation I may give
 That due to thee which thou deserv'st alone.

(5-8)

Sonnet 39 is a subtle and ironic exposition of the Petrarchan urge to praise, supposed as emanating from the beloved. Concurrently with this theme, Shakespeare treats the Petrarchan and Neoplatonic convention that the lovers' unity overcomes separation. Combining both ideas in the same sonnet, Shakespeare finds them to be incompatible.

"O how thy worth with manners may I sing" raises the objection that Petrarchists are not reticent about being tongue-tied. When Sidney's *Astrophel* says,

But if (both for your love and skill) your name
 You seek to nurse at fullest breasts of Fame,
 Stella behold, and then begin to indite.

(15, 12-14)

we may note that he has already filled two quatrains and half a sestet, with no mention of Stella. But the irony is too obvious for Sidney to have been unaware of it. Here, as with other sonnets early in the cycle, Sidney is concerned to identify and discard the *wrong* modes of address. What he seeks are "fit words" (*A&S.* 1, 1). Such words are essentially those which Puttenham, describes as "decent."¹⁹ Both writers are talking about decorum, about the fitness of words to their subject and to their register. Subject and register combine together in Renaissance ideas of genre, and the expectations arising from the different genres governed the current base, mean, and high varieties of poetic diction. Each variety of diction represented a standard of decorum, whose proper application was to be judged by the reader, since generic expectations were implicitly those of the reader. Praise of an individual was, according to generic expectations, the province of the lyric. Thus, while reading a complimentary lyric, the

¹⁹ Puttenham, p.270.

Renaissance reader was judging the decorum of the poet's praise in terms of its fitness for the addressee. Such judgement is implicit in Sidney's comment on derivative poets: "if I were a mistress, such poets would never convince me they were in love."²⁰ Nowadays, we tend to equate praise with flattery. Yet Sidney's "studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain" (*A&S.* 1, 6) denotes more than the mere wish to flatter; or, rather, it aspires to flattery of a kind which would not have seemed base to him. "To entertain" means not only to amuse, but to *involve*.²¹ Sidney's wish "to entertain" Stella's "wits" is simultaneously an intention to involve the reader. The reader created complex exigencies for the Elizabethan poets, and their practice, in lyric poetry, of conflating the addressee with the reader of a poem is partly a response to these exigencies. The conflation is, of course, problematic because of a largely male readership. Perhaps this is a clue to Shakespeare's subtle inclusion of the addressee in the *Sonnets*, of which the first 126 are addressed to a man.

I have outlined a situation in which the poet's sense of obligation to the reader is objectified as the speaker's struggle to find "fit words" for the addressee. By referring to sonnets by Sidney and Shakespeare, I have tried show the addressee as an instructive presence in their work. My purpose has been to show, and perhaps artificially to highlight, the difference between these poets and Donne. When Donne creates dramatic scenarios involving himself and an addressee, he does so not to be taught - as Stella instructs Astrophel in the arduous paths of virtue - but to direct his energetic banter at a suitably passive object. There are exceptions, of course, such as the obsequious verse letters to the Countess of Bedford. And there will be a time, later in his career, when he will plead, "Teach mee how to repent" ("Holy Sonnet VII," 13). But generally this poet scorns to be taught:

Tell me, where all past yeares are,
Or who cleft the Divels foot,
Teach me to heare Mermaides singing,

²⁰ *A Defence* pp.69-70.

²¹ Elizabethans were sensitive to etymological puns; the word derives from the French "*entretenir*," of which the Latin etymology signifies "to hold among" (Cf. OED, 1987, P.293).

Or to keep off envies stinging,
 And find
 What winde
 Serves to advance an honest minde.
 ("Song," 3-9)

Donne is clearly selecting absurdities in order to justify his tirade: none of this, he implies, is worth knowing about. The same holds for the object of the poem's mock pilgrimage: that Petrarchan ideal, "a woman true and fair" (18). She does not exist, and even if she did, she would be "false" (27) before the speaker could catch up with her. Similarly, the speaker of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* hopes to address one "Fair, kind, and true" (105, 9), but the underlying anxiety of the *Sonnets* often suggests that he may be speaking into thin air. Donne apparently prefers not to take that risk. Instead, his tactic in "Song" is to address a male figure, who is told to search (or, rather, not to bother searching) for a woman having the qualities that Shakespeare's Sonnet 105 requires of its addressee. This is typical of the cynical self-cautioning that tends to break out in Donne's poetry, and suggests that the advice given to the addressee of "Song" is intended for the speaker himself. This brings us back to a central problem in Petrarchan poetry: the conflict between the speaker's tendency towards introspection and his need to address the "cause" of his predicament. Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* begins with the intention to find "fit words" with which to address Stella; but it is not until the thirty-sixth sonnet of the sequence that Astrophel speaks to her directly.

The tendency of the Petrarchan mode of address to retreat into introversion and reflexivity is highlighted in a speech of Troilus from Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*:

O that I thought it could be in a woman -
 As if it can I will presume in you -
 To feed for aye her lamp and flames of love;
 To keep her constancy in plight and youth,
 Outliving beauty's outward with a mind
 That doth renew swifter than blood decays!
 Or that persuasion could but thus convince me

That my integrity and truth to you
 Might be affronted with the match and weight
 Of such a winnowed purity in love,
 How were I then uplifted! But, alas!
 I am as true as truth's simplicity,
 And simpler than the infancy of truth!²²

The Cressida to whom Troilus speaks is a figment of his imagination. Even so, his speech is marred by insecurity and bears no relation to what Cressida has said in the lines that precede his. Troilus is in fact talking about himself, and deluding himself in the process. Donne's attitude to such a foolish and overweening lover can be summed up by the first words of "The Broken Heart": "He is starke mad."

²² William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida* ed. Kenneth Muir (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) III.ii.165-177.

4. DONNE AND OVID

In his elegy for Donne, Carew predicts that Donne's less gifted and original successors will be forced to reintroduce "the silenc'd tales o' the Metamorphoses" (66).¹ Yet Donne's persona is often Ovidian; consistently so in his elegies, and also, conspicuously, in "Satyre XIX" and "The Flea" (though the latter poem treats, in fact, a medieval theme mistakenly associated with Ovid). By assuming an Ovidian pose, Donne is establishing a link with a tradition which had been viewed as *risqué* at least since the time of Chaucer. Throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance it was thought necessary to "improve" Ovid by providing interpretative commentaries, frequently of a didactic nature. During the late sixteenth century Ovid was often a target of censorship, and in 1599 the ecclesiastical authorities ordered Marlowe's translation of the *Amores* to be burnt.² Thus, one may see Ovidianism as a discourse aimed against a powerful and repressive sector of society. Yet it would be wrong, on this basis, to see it as an anti-social discourse; just as it would be simplistic to imagine that the satires of the 1590s are as straightforwardly opposed to Court and city as they purport to be. For a significant part of the London population of the 1590s the raciness of Ovidianism was highly sympathetic, as is evinced by the immense popularity of Shakespeare's Ovidian epyllion, *Venus and Adonis* (1593). Experimentation with the Ovidian epyllion was fashionable among young writers, and it can be assumed that the audience for which they wrote tended, likewise, to be youthful. Furthermore, at least two such writers had connections with the Inns of Court: Thomas Lodge (who did not long persist in his legal studies) and John Marston, who, as we have seen, was also a writer of satire. Thus both satire and Ovidianism found a fertile environment, during the 1590s, in the Inns of Court, where they

¹ See Grierson *The Poems of John Donne*, pp. 371-395.

² See Bald, p.122. Interestingly, the works destroyed along with Marlowe's translation included Guilpin's satirical *Skialethia*. Satire and Ovid were both, evidently, under disapproval, and the fact that satire tended to be written in the rhyming pentameter couplets that Marlowe introduced in his translation of the *Amores* probably increased the tendency to associate satire with the licentiousness of Ovid. This may indeed have been the intention of the satirical writers who borrowed Marlowe's form.

doubtless served to channel the perennial student need to oppose established institutions and values. The Inns of Court, comprising much of Donne's likely readership during the 1590s; allowed for release from moral strictures, at least at a ritual level, in the student revels, which also provided a showcase for student writing; Donne, we remember, was himself was for a time Master of the Revels at Lincoln's Inn. Donne's Ovidianism should be seen, accordingly, as consistent with his consciousness of addressing an Inns of Court audience that we have already noted in his *Satyres*.

Ovidianism was prominent among the literary influences which writers could use in order to question or oppose many aspects of late sixteenth century culture, including Petrarchism. As Sandra Clark puts it:

[Ovid] spoke of human sexuality in terms which seemed relevant and challenging at a time when various forces, such as Puritanism, humanist culture, and the power over people's imaginations exercised by the Virgin Queen, combined to unsettle and even change accepted attitudes to love, marriage, and gender relationships. Ovid's bold and often shocking depictions in the *Metamorphoses* of the effects of sexual desire appealed particularly to young writers interested in questioning the conventions of Petrarchanism.³

In addition to a sexual attitude diametrically opposed to that of Petrarchism, Ovidianism furnished Donne with a precedent for one of his favourite topics: change. We have seen already how the obsessively Petrarchan Duke Orsino of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* compensates for the skittishness of his personality by a fixation on "the constant image / Of her that is beloved." Constancy is one of the foremost qualities of the speaker of Petrarchan poetry; in speech and in thought he is, to quote from Shakespeare's Sonnet 76, "all one, ever the same" (5). Constancy is, likewise, a quality which the Petrarchist longs to find in his addressee: "To feed for aye her lamp and flames of love," as Troilus hopelessly expects of Cressida.

³ Sandra Clark ed., *Amorous Rites: Elizabethan Erotic Verse* (London: Everyman, 1994) intro. p.xxix.

Troilus' commitment to the Petrarchan ideal of constancy may perhaps betray a reluctance to have his own constancy brought to question. Who, after all *can* be "in love one hour"? The least self-examination on the part of one who espoused Petrarchism might destroy the firmness of his belief in such a role. But, since the role helped to define his identity, he would be unwilling to part with it. We are now familiar with the Jungian concept of transference, a psychological mechanism that copes with qualities that we wish to reject in ourselves by projecting them onto another. In the light of this, it is tempting to see the Petrarchist's fear of woman's inconstancy as a classic case of transference. In Act II, scene iv of Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, the worldly Cardinal is suspected by Julia, his adulterous mistress, of cooling in his affections towards her. The former resorts, in self-defence, to the conventional view that all women are, by nature, inconstant:

Cardinal:	You fear
	My constancy, because you have approv'd
	Those giddy and wild turnings in yourself.
Julia:	Did you ere find them?
Cardinal:	Sooth, generally for women:
	A man might strive to make glass malleable,
	Ere he should make them fixed. (II. iv. 10 - 15) ⁴

The fear of female inconstancy is subtly interwoven with the Platonic bias of Elizabethan high culture. In Platonism the supreme reality lies beyond the flawed and transitory world that we perceive with our senses in immutable, abstract *ideas*, from which our world derives its limited existence. Via the Neoplatonism of late antiquity, these *ideas* came to be identified with the mind of God. Subsequently, through a combination of biblical mythology with Neoplatonism, our world came to be seen as a defaced record of the ideal world which had existed before

⁴ Webster, *Three Plays* ed. David Gunby (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972)

the Fall. In the first of Spenser's "Two Cantos of Mutability"⁵ the destructive force of change, ruling all things beneath the heavenly seat of Jove, is represented in terms that remind one of a callous Petrarchan mistress:

What man that sees the ever-whirling wheel
Of Change, the which all mortal things doth sway,
But that thereby doth find, and plainly feel,
How Mutability in them doth play
Her cruel sports, to many mens decay?

(1-5)

So described, Spenser's "Dame Mutability" is identical with "shifting change," the quality which Shakespeare's Sonnet 20 deems to be "false women's fashion" (4).

For Ovid, however, change is a force to be celebrated: "Of bodies changed to other forms I tell,"⁶ he announces at the outset of the *Metamorphoses*. Likewise, the libertine speaker predominant in Donne's *Elegies* and frequently encountered in the *Songs and Sonets* delights in, or at least acknowledges, his changeable nature: "The heavens rejoyce in motion, why should I / Abjure my so much lov'd variety" ("Elegie XVII," 1-2). Nor does such a speaker wish his female addressee to be inclined otherwise than himself. In "The Indifferent" Donne's speaker is as un-Petrarchan as he could possibly be, boasting of his own profligacy and taunting any woman who inclines towards constancy. While the Petrarchist typically addresses his devotion to one woman, Donne's speaker in "The Indifferent" insults and harangues womankind in general: "Will it not serve your turn to do, as did your mothers?" (10).

Further aspects of Ovid's celebration of change in the *Metamorphoses* may well have been liberating for the kinds of narration employed by Donne. Ovid's decision to treat various myths involving transformation from one state to another

⁵ Edmund Spenser "Two Cantos of Mutability" in *The Literature of Renaissance England* ed. John Hollander and Frank Kermode (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) pp. 311-320.

⁶ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* trans A.D. Melville. intro. E.J. Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) p.1.

enables him to narrate situations which are inherently unstable. Thus he creates poetry which, while smaller in scale than the epic, has the momentum of epic narration. Petrarchan poetry, on the other hand, deals generally with rather static situations, such as hope, frustration, or separation; or else with events of extreme brevity, such as a glance or a blush. So restricted, Petrarchan verse extends through analytic elaboration and, ultimately, by means of the sonnet sequence. Donne's poetry is, likewise, analytic; but it is practically impossible to regard the *Songs and Sonets* as a sequence. Moreover, a survey of Donne's poetry reveals a strong preference for subject matter which is, by its very nature, transitional: the passage of one day ("A Lecture upon the Shadow"); dawn ("The Sunne Rising"); the birth and maturation of love ("Aire and Angels"). Donne's choice of transitional subject matter provides his speaker with a shifting *context* (the term is Jakobson's). Such a context furnishes a narrative which matches the errancy of Donne's own mind. As John Carey puts it: "mutability . . . was a part of himself was to talk about change and to change as he talked."⁷

Among his many poems dealing with change, the *tour de force* must be Donne's incomplete epic, *Metempsychosis*. The work is dominated by the Ovidian subject of change from one state to another. In a prefatory epistle Donne requires the reader to "remember . . . that the Pithagorian doctrine doth not only carry one soul from man to man, nor man to beast, but indifferently to plants also."⁸ Equipped with this information, the reader must accompany the soul that Donne supposes to have dwelt in Eden's forbidden fruit, as it passes through numerous bodies, including those of a mandrake, a sparrow, a fish, a swan, an oyster-catcher, a whale and an elephant (the list is far from complete). In the course of his narration Donne inserts many asides to the reader that give evidence of a sour and sceptical frame of mind at the time of composition. Such asides are the psychological counterpart to the world that Donne creates in *Metempsychosis*; a world governed by the incontestable force of mutability. The social injustices of which the satirical speaker complains become,

⁷ Carey, p.167

⁸ See Patrides, p.314.

in *Metempsychosis*, an inevitable consequence of nature's lawless appetite. The railing of satire is transformed, accordingly, to grim acceptance. The strong prey on the weak; that is all: "For he that can to none / Resistance make, nor complaint, sure is gone. / Weakness invites, but silence feasts oppression" (248-250). Though the poem is unfinished, it terminates aptly in a mood of complete scepticism:

Ther's nothing simply good, nor ill alone,
Of every quality comparison,
The onely measure is, and judge, opinion.
(518-20)

The mood is akin to that of Hamlet - "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so" (II.ii.252-253) - and is typical of the melancholia prevalent at the turn of the sixteenth century (*Hamlet* and *Metempsychosis* belong to the same year:1601). Afflicted by melancholy arising from an almost Pascalian sense of the triumph of Evil, Hamlet finds in a corrupt world nothing but the confirmation of his personal disposition. Early in the play he claims to "have that within which passeth show" (I.ii.85), namely his grief. On this he initially depends for a sense of inward stability and resistance to the general tide of corruption. But as the play progresses and Hamlet's feigned condition of madness comes to seem alarmingly like the real thing, we become unsure as to whether his behaviour conceals or, rather, calls into question the inner coherence of his personality. As Hamlet's own sense of integrity crumbles, his satirical tongue sharpens against those who seem to him to have embraced corruption. Not least among the guilty is womankind, tainted (it is generally assumed) by the disgust Hamlet feels towards his mother. Ophelia, having been the recipient of Hamlet's stilted Petrarchan poetry (Cf. II.ii.116-119), becomes the target of his satirical gibes: "God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another, you jig, you amble, you lisp, you nickname God's creatures, and you make your wantonness your ignorance" (III. iii. 146-149).

In *Metempsychosis* Eve's transgression plunges the world into the cycle of birth and death, since it is she who has released the soul of the forbidden fruit. Not surprisingly, the poem contains a

lengthy indictment of woman, seen here as the source of corruption and of “death” in both the literal and Petrarchan sense:

Man all at once was there by woman slaine,
 And one by one we're slaine o'er againe
 By them. The mother poison'd the well-head,
 The daughters here corrupt us, Rivolets,
 No smalnesse scapes, no greatnesse breaks their nets,
 She thrust us out, and by them we are led
 Astray, from turning, to whence we are fled.
 Were prisoners Judges, 'twould seeme rigorous,
 Shee sinn'd, we beare; part of our paine is, thus
 To love them, whose fault to this painful love yoak'd us.
 (91-100)

For men, entrapment in the cycle of birth and death entails escape from and fatal return to the vagina. As so often in Donne, the words “we,” “us” and “our” mark this aside as intended for the like-minded male addressee.

Another narrative ploy which Donne is likely to have derived from Ovid is the identification of the speaker with some object which is taken to be emblematic of his condition. It is in this sense that “The Flea” is in line with Ovidian tradition. Here the speaker identifies both himself and his addressee with a bed-hopping flea: “This flea is you and I” (12). In Book II of the *Amores*⁹ the fifteenth elegy describes Ovid's envy of a seal-ring, which he has given to his lover, Corinna. He imagines the delights which might ensue if he were to undergo metamorphosis and be transformed into the ring:

I hope she'll welcome you and over
 Her knuckle slip you, from her lover,
 And straightway you'll neatly hug
 Her finger, fitting just as snug
 As she fits me. O happy ring,
 That to the girl I love can cling!

⁹ All translations from the *Amores* are taken from *Ovid: The Love Poems* trans. A.D. Melville ed. E.J. Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). Hereafter cited as *Ovid: The Love Poems*.

I envy now my gift's new home.
 Would I might suddenly become
 That ring myself (the magic change
 Circe or Proteus could arrange).
 Then when I would her bosom press
 And slip my hand inside her dress,
 I'd squeeze myself from her dear finger
 (However tight, I wouldn't linger)
 And working loose by magic art
 Drop to the fold beside her heart;
 Or if she wrote a secret letter,
 To help me seal the tablets better,
 (My stone not dry, the wax quite free)
 My darling's tongue would moisten me-
 Provided I was never set
 To seal a note that I'd regret.¹⁰

Many of Donne's poems speculate about the significance of love-tokens. In several among these - among them, "The Bracelet" and "The Relique" - the events which may befall the love-token become, as in Ovid's elegy, the basis of a narrative. A poem which invites direct comparison with Ovid's elegy is "A Jeat Ring sent." Here, the speaker compares himself - and the woman who has sent him the ring - with the ring's qualities (it is as black as his heart and as breakable as her affection). A section of Ovid's elegy - you'll neatly hug / Her finger fitting just as snug / As she fits me - resembles a less obscene thought in "A Jeat ring sent": "Circle this fingers top, which did'st her thombe" (10). The likelihood that Donne read and was influenced by Ovid's elegy is further supported by "A Valediction of my name in the window." Here, the speaker imaginatively assumes the properties of his own name, which he has scratched into his mistress' window. This indelible signature will, he hopes, continue to remind her of him during his forthcoming absence, and will even defend him against a potential rival (somewhat implausibly, by casting its shadow on the rival's love-letter, and thereby signing it as his own): "May my name step in, and hide his." (54). The conceit is clearly similar

¹⁰ Ovid: *The Love Poems*, p.48.

to Ovid's idea that if he were Corinna's ring, he would gladly seal her private correspondence - providing he did not have to endorse "a note that I'd regret."

The identification of the speaker with a symbolic object is essentially a narrative device, one which is useful for Donne in terms of what it permits him to say. At the same time, it constitutes an extension of his highly variable persona, and becomes, moreover, dramatic through Donne's trick of speaking not only about, but *as* the things with which he identifies. In this way Donne not only dictates, but incorporates himself into his narratives, and he does this by assuming an extraordinary number of personae: emblematic guises, such as a map ("Hymne to God my God in my sicknesse") or a weeping fountain ("Twicknam Garden"); and macabre versions of the speaker, who becomes his own epitaph ("A Nocturnall"), his own corpse ("The Funerall"), and his own ghost ("The Apparition"). A complete list would challenge that of the bodies occupied by the vagrant soul of *Metempsychosis*. Moreover, several of Donne's addressees have an Ovidian quality, as for example the sun ("The Sunne Rising"), a ring ("A Jeat Ring Sent"), a flower (The Blossome"), and Venus ("The Indifferent"). The guises assumed by the speaker may, to some extent, be associated with Petrarchism. But Donne's thorough identification with a Petrarchan symbol, such as a weeping fountain, serves a narrative purpose which is distinctly Ovidian. The same may be said of the symbolic objects that Donne apostrophises. How different, for example, is Sidney's invocation of the moon - "With how sad steps, O moon" (A&S, 31, 1) - from Donne's "The Sunne Rising." The former poem uses the moon as a symbol for the speaker's condition; whereas Donne's sun is adversarial and provokes such a mobile narrative that one hardly notices that it is not (for the moment) going anywhere.

On occasion, Donne apostrophises some mythological personage midway through a poem, thus producing a change of speaker and a new narrative viewpoint. This switching from one narrator to another is extensively employed in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and is also a favoured device of the fashionable Ovidian epyllia; occurring, for example, in Thomas Lodge's *Scylla's Metamorphosis: Interlaced with the unfortunate love of Glaucus*. In Donne's "The Indifferent," Venus is abruptly introduced at the

beginning of the last stanza. Initially, it is implied that she is a kind of addressee, since she has eavesdropped on the speaker: "Venus heard me sigh this song" (19). She therefore supersedes the audience of women to whom the poem has previously been addressed. In so doing, she alters the nature of the poem, giving the speaker's words a new kind of fictional status. What had formerly seemed mock-rhetorical becomes "this song." Retrospectively, therefore, it appears that the speaker is not an orator but a lyric poet addressing a fantasy audience. Since Venus approves of the speaker's praise of promiscuity, she agrees to vindicate him by casting a curse on those few lovers who still "thinke to stablish dangerous constancie" (25). In her speech, which ends the poem, Venus herself becomes the speaker, and produces a two-fold address: to the speaker/persona, and to constant lovers who seem now to be *male* (the poem was formerly addressed to *women* of that foolish persuasion):

alas, Some two or three
Poore Heretiques in love there bee,
Which thinke to stablish dangerous constancie.
But I have told them, since you will be true,
You shall be true to them, who'are false to you.
(23-27)

We may assume that "You," in the last line, probably signifies constant male lovers, since the line bears a resemblance to another cynical termination, that of the "Song," "Goe, and catch a falling starre": "Yet shee / Will be / False, ere I come, to two, or three." (25-27).

A full list of the speakers and addressees implied in "The Indifferent" is even more extensive than I have so far indicated. Firstly, there are two obvious speakers: the main persona and Venus; then four addressees: constant women, constant men, Venus, and lastly the persona himself, whom Venus addresses towards the end of the poem. So far, however, I have only accounted for those speakers and addressees whose presence is directly indicated by the text. We may deduce that others are implied. A libertine reader is an implied addressee - and in a sense a speaker - since the persona claims to speak on his behalf:

“doth a fear that men are true, torment you? / Oh we are not” (13-14). A quick succession of rhetorical questions (posed by the speaker/ persona) seem to be uttered against a background of protest. Surely, we are intended to *hear*, in our imagination, the resentment of decent women as the speaker harangues them:

Will no other vice content you?

Wil it not serve your turn to do, as did your mothers?

Or have you all old vices spent, and now would finde out others?

Or doth a feare, that men are true, torment you?

(9-12)

The women, at this point, are suppressed speakers. Their imagined grumbles underlie what we are reading, much as if the persona were a dramatic character holding forth against an angry crowd. Moreover, the harangue is artfully worded so as to make an articulate objection well-nigh impossible: to answer either “yes” or “no” to such questions would clearly confound the objector as a hypocrite. By this means Donne ensures that his Ovidian discourse is impervious to one favouring Platonic or Petrarchan love; though in fact his Ovidianism could not have been articulated without reference its rivals. Thus, “The Indifferent” constitutes a kind of dialectical contest between sacred and profane love, in which one half of the dialectic is cunningly suppressed. I have shown that an approving reader is signified in this poem by the word “we”; but surely such a reader’s relish derives from the likelihood that readers of a different disposition would be offended by “The Indifferent.” It is easy to guess who Donne imagines the latter sort to be, since the vocabulary of “The Indifferent” contrives to be most offensive where it portrays conventional morality as a form of vice. Thus, fidelity is denounced as the latest addition to the “old vices” (11) of women, and the vocabulary and stance of satire are perversely misapplied in praise of immoral conduct, in the manner of Donne’s *Paradoxes and Problems*. In addition, Petrarchan constancy is deemed not merely immoral but irreligious: a failing proper to love’s “Heretiques” (24). The term is doubly offensive: first, to those who would assume the orthodox and Petrarchan equation of constancy with faith; and second, to the high-

minedly religious, since the term is trivialised by transference from the context of religious controversy to that of sexual ethics (it should be remembered that Ovidianism was especially distasteful to the ecclesiastical authorities).

But to propose a simple division between two possible responses to "The Indifferent," and to allocate these responses to different kinds of reader can be misleading. Any reader of the *Songs and Sonets* is expected, in certain poems, to endorse constancy against the cynical libertinism of such poems as "The Indifferent." Thus Donne may be said to draw on the latent instability of opinion present in all but the most dogmatic readers. In so doing, he exploits the reader's experience as a reader. The sonneteering vogue ensured that any literate person of the late sixteenth century would be familiar with Petrarchism, and Ovid was used to teach schoolboys their Latin. Moreover, Donne exploits his rhetorical gifts to defend, as he pleases, one course of action against another, equally defensible, in the manner of the *dissoi logoi* of ancient sophistic philosophy. Finally, he depends on the momentum of his writing as a means of forestalling possible objection. A combination of two factors assists him in this respect. The lively, idiomatic speech makes it seem that we are hearing *one* voice throughout the poem; yet within that voice a shifting identity for both speaker and addressee makes it possible for Donne to mount an attack suddenly from another quarter.

The momentum of Donne's writing ensures, according to Leishman, that we are "without any warning, suddenly tricked into accepting some proposition, some attitude, we should like to qualify or protest against, but the author gives us no time to do so, and sweeps us along as though we had agreed with him."¹¹ And yet the shifts of perspective in a poem such as "The Indifferent" make it, in the end, difficult for us to know exactly to what we had consented; and perhaps, as I have suggested, our consent is not necessarily what had been sought. We must at least be aware that the poem is advancing an argument that many would think vicious and unorthodox: otherwise, the references to

¹¹ J.B. Leishman *The Monarch of Wit* 6th ed. (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1962) p.65. Hereafter cited as Leishman.

vice and heresy would be deprived of their shock-value. But it is the persona's betrayal of feelings at odds with his apparent conviction that does most to undermine the rhetoric of "The Indifferent." Our first impression establishes him as a successful seducer who "can love both fair and brown"; and the brag seems at this point to be addressed to no-one in particular. Next, however, he turns on women, whose "vice" of constancy has perhaps proved frustrating: "Let me, and doe you, twenty know" retains the possibility that he "can" love indiscriminately, but leaves us to wonder whether he has actually practised what he preaches. The invocation of Venus seems a rather desperate measure for one so sure of himself, and reduces, as I have suggested, his confident oratory to a mere fantasy address. Even Venus' set-piece contains details that work against the main thrust of the argument: if love's "Heretiques" are beneath contempt, then why are they to be pitied ("poor Heretiques"). Moreover, her final curse reads like a bitter moral: "You shall be true to them, who'are false to you." What are we to take from such a statement? Is it contemptuous? Does it envy the possibility of constancy in love? Does it signify the persona's wish, his belief, or his experience? Has he turned libertine from choice or desperation? I do not mean to soften the tone of "The Indifferent," but merely to point out the possibility of reading much more into this apparently straightforward poem than the monological argument it seems to advance. The last line in particular has, as so often in Donne, the potential cast to all that we had previously read in a different light. Moreover, we have the authority of Donne himself, in one of his rare statements about his art, to suppose that his terminations are intended to carry some extra weight:

in all metricall compositions . . . the force of the whole piece, is for the most part left to the shutting up; the whole frame of the Poem is a beating out of a piece of gold, but the last clause is as the impression of the stamp, and that is that makes it currant.¹²

¹² *Sermons*, VI, p.41.

My analysis of "The Indifferent" has sought to exemplify the evolution and uncertainty of meaning found in much of Donne's poetry, and to relate that tendency to the shifts of narrative voice employed in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the Ovidian epillion. We have seen, in addition, that the reader's sophistication is enlisted so as to make "The Indifferent" a contest, in the reader's mind, between the rival discourses of Petrarchism and Ovidianism. Indeed, "The Indifferent" makes a straightforward appeal to a contemporary reader's recollection of Ovid, in that the first stanza is a direct adaptation from another Ovidian source, the *Amores*. The poem's list of female types, all potential prey for the licentious speaker, is essentially a condensed and updated version of Ovid's list in the fourth elegy of Book II of the *Amores*. In fact, Donne's opening line - "I can love both fair and brown" - is lifted straight from Ovid's poem: "I fall for blondes, I fall for girls who're auburn."¹³

Ovid's *Amores* constitute an extremely important early influence on Donne. Though, as I have suggested, the *Metamorphoses* were influential for Donne's flexible narratives, it is the *Amores* that connect him most directly with Ovid. According to Leishman,

[t]he Ovid of the *Metamorphoses*, the mythological Ovid, had already been exploited *ad nauseam* ; . . . Donne seems to have been the first to perceive what novel, surprising and shocking effects might be produced by exploiting the more realistic and naturalistic Ovid of the *Amores*. To transfer some of Ovid's characteristic situations and assumptions to Elizabethan London, and to express them as though they were perfectly normal, was in itself a daring piece of originality.¹⁴

Numerous close resemblances between passages from the *Amores* and from Donne's poetry¹⁵ suggest that it is above all from Ovid that Donne derives two of the traits most typical of his speaker: cynical hedonism, and individualistic resistance to the

¹³ Ovid: *The Love Poems*, pp.32-33.

¹⁴ Leishman, p.58.

¹⁵ I am indebted to Leishman for several of the resemblances between Donne and Ovid's *Amores* that I discuss from this point onwards.

normal constraints and preoccupations of society. Both traits are exhibited in "The Indifferent"; but the second needs more examination, since it is by no means always linked with the first. Indeed, the kind of love which entitles the speaker to claim immunity from normal moral and social preoccupations is often closer to Petrarchan constancy than to Ovidian amorality. The tenth elegy of Book II of the *Amores* celebrates love as a finer occupation than soldiering or trade. Accordingly, heroism and profit - certainly admirable aims in Roman society- are here subjected to derision:

Let soldiers get their chests stuck full of arrows
 And buy eternal glory with their gore;
 Let traders in their greed criss-cross the ocean,
 And swill it, with their swindles, far from shore.¹⁶

This passage has several parallels in Donne's poetry, the most obvious being the second stanza of "The Canonization":

Alas, alas, who's injur'd by my love?
 What merchants ships have my sighs drown'd?
 Who saies my teares have overflow'd his ground?
 When did my colds a forward spring remove?
 When did the heats which my veines fill
 Adde one more to the plague bill?
 Soldiers finde warres, and Lawyers finde out still
 Litigious men, which quarrels move,
 Though she and I do love.

But here the resemblance to Ovid is outweighed by the dissimilarities. Petrarchism has been ingeniously combined with the Ovidian material, the former being conspicuous in the vocabulary of "sighs," "teares," and the oxymoronic "heats" and "colds." Moreover, the speaker of "The Canonization" defends his love for *one* woman; whereas Ovid's poem sets out to maintain the possibility of loving *two*:

¹⁶ Ovid: *The Love Poems*, p.42.

No man can love two girls at once, you told me
 Graecinus - I remember it was you.
 It's all your fault I'm tricked and caught defenceless;
 You see me shamed - in love at once with two.¹⁷

Both poems have an addressee whose views about love differ from those of the speaker; but Donne's addressee has a far more persistent presence than Ovid's, the latter being no more than a pretext to set a poem in motion. By the time the reader arrives at Ovid's imperious dismissal of the foolish soldier and the greedy merchant, his words no longer seem to be addressed to anyone in particular. Donne, however, converts these imperatives to a series of rhetorical questions, thereby preventing the reader from forgetting the addressee. Moreover, Donne enlarges the passage from Ovid in order to transform the speaker and addressee from Augustan Romans to Renaissance Londoners: unprincipled "lawyers" are added to the list of despised professions, and reference made to the list of plague victims, "the plague Bill."

A further two poems by Donne contain passages reminiscent of the one that I have quoted from Ovid's *Amores*: "The good-morrow" and "The Sunne Rising." In these, the privilege, granted by love, of ignoring social constraints and values is extended to include both the speaker and a female addressee. In "The good-morrow" the speaker advises her to share his indifference to worldly ambition, here symbolised (as in Ovid) by seafaring enterprise:

Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone
 Let Maps to other, worlds on worlds have showne
 Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.
 (13-14)

Not only do the speaker and addressee "possess" something of greater value than whatever could be had by exploring "new worlds": they *are* worlds, both jointly and separately. This combined identity, wherein each party remains mysteriously individual, brings to mind the opening of Donne's verse letter,

¹⁷ Ovid: *The Love Poems*, p.41.

"The Storme": "Thou which art I . . . / Thou which art still thy selfe." In case of "The good-morrow," however, the combination of distinct selves is undoubtedly taken from Neoplatonism; the idea is elaborated in a passage from Ficino's *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*:

whenever two people are brought together in mutual affection, one lives in the other and the other in him. In this way they mutually exchange identities; each gives himself to the other in such a way that each receives the other in return; . . . each has himself and has the other too. A has himself, but in B; and B also has himself, but in A.¹⁸

The love-theorising of the *Symposium* crops up later in "The good-morrow," in a reference to Aristophanes' myth concerning the originally spherical form and compound yet double nature of human beings. Donne's lovers find themselves to be "two . . . hemispheres" (17) comprising one sphere: in other words, "one world."

So far, "The Good-morrow" appears to be a poem about Platonic love that draws on Ovidian material to confirm the extra mundane character of such love. But as in "The Indifferent," so here certain details of vocabulary expose other discourses, and again the result is that the reader finds it difficult to know exactly what the speaker describes or endorses. Since the poem is a kind of *aubade*, it is quite possible to read it as a celebration of a night's sexual activity, about to be resumed in daylight. Reference is made to "one little room" (11) (a bedroom, presumably); the speaker and addressee are to "*possesse* one world" (my italics), and will not (he hopes) "slacken" (21) in doing so. On the other hand, the present condition of the lovers seems to be unprecedented. All the speaker's previous loves were "but a dreame of thee" (7), and if the dream was metaphorical then perhaps the night signifies nothing more than "what thou, and I / Did, till we lov'd" (2); it really depends on what the speaker

¹⁸ Cited in: Toshishiko Kawasaki, "Donne's Microcosm" in *Seventeenth Century Imagery* ed. Earl Miner (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971) p.31.

means by "lov'd." Moreover, it is not the bodies of the lovers that are said to awake but their "soules" (8). This calls to mind the fantasy of resurrection in "The Relique," where it is hoped that the lovers will meet on the day of Judgement (10-11). Thoughts of immortality would be quite appropriate in a poem about Platonic love, since Socrates rounds off the *Symposium* by identifying love as a force that impels all creatures to seek immortality.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Socrates gives unstinting praise only to "Platonic" love (as it came to be called). Sex, he concedes, brings about immortality through procreation; but the highest love is that which stirs the lover to great achievements which secure immortality through fame. A neat solution to the problem would be to be to claim that Donne is subverting the *Symposium* by conferring the highest praise on carnal love. But such a definite programme would rob the poem of its ambiguities. True, the speaker does seem to aligning love with the hope of immortality; and yet that hope seems to hover between the wish for a durable affection and the wish that love might really overcome death's inevitability. The conditional mood of the poem's concluding statement leaves the reader unsure both of the speaker's conviction and of what he is "really" saying: "If our two loves be one, or thou and I / Love so alike, that none doe slacken, none can die" (21: my italics). As I have indicated, the word "slacken," may be read in a sexual context; so too might the word "die," a conventional euphemism for orgasm. But "none can die" obviously contradicts the possibility of a sexual significance for the word "die," unless the speaker is dealing with a related connotation of the word: that "each such Act . . . / Diminisheth the length of life a day" (Donne: "Farewell to love," 24). Perhaps an ideally mutual love forestalls *that* possibility; or perhaps vigorous love-making will defer post-coital lethargy. As with "The Indifferent," so with "The good-morrow" the reader has been betrayed by the speaker's confident rhetoric into believing that he voices a internally consistent argument. But this seeming consistency is more securely achieved in "The good-morrow" than in "The Indifferent," because the addressee, single rather than multiple, is a stabilising presence throughout.

¹⁹ See Plato *The Symposium* in *Dialogues of Plato*, ed. J.D. Kaplan, pp.212-18.

The trick of using the addressee in this manner seems to have been one that Donne learned only gradually. It is possible that the chaotic apostrophising of a poem such as "The Indifferent" shows Donne to be imitating Ovid's tendency to do likewise in his *Amores*. Often, however, Ovid attempts to specify a single addressee by beginning an elegy in the manner of a verse letter. This practice is followed in Donne's "Elegie XX" ("Loves Warre"), which draws on the ninth elegy of Book I of the *Amores*. Ovid's elegy is initially addressed to a male friend, but soon loses sight of him. In an attempt, perhaps, to make his elegy more effective dramatically, Donne chooses instead to make the addressee one and the same with the woman whom the speaker loves. But, like Ovid, Donne quickly loses sight of the person he is addressing. As a result, says Leishman,

[o]ne is not aware, as one is in most of the dramatic elegies . . . of a person whom Donne is addressing and whose real or imaginary personality is to some extent dictating and qualifying what he says: one is only aware of Donne himself, wittily developing a paradox. He might as well have addressed the elegy to a friend, have substituted the third person for the second, and have begun: Till I have peace with *her*, warr other men.²⁰

Other elegies, however, are more dramatically successful precisely because Donne, unlike Ovid, contrives to focus on an addressee who is involved in the same situation as the speaker. Thus, "While Ovid merely describes situations, Donne enacts them . . . Such elegies are essentially dramatic monologues - monologues, that is to say, whose tone is modified by, adapted to, the particular person Donne imagines himself to be addressing"²¹

Finally, in my survey of Donne's debt to Ovid, I must mention the secrecy of lovers' means of communication as described in the fourth elegy of Book I of the *Amores*:

Arrive before your husband. Not that I can
See quite what good arriving first will do;

²⁰ Leishman, p.75.

²¹ Leishman, p.61.

But still arrive before him. When he's taken
 His place upon the couch and you go too
 To sit beside him on your best behaviour,
 Stealthily touch my foot, and look at me,
 Watching my nods, my eyes, my face's language;
 Catch and return my signals secretly.
 I'll send a wordless message with my eyebrows;
 You'll read my fingers' words, words traced in wine.²²

This is extremely important for Donne, as it supplies a theme which he will elaborate throughout his secular poetry. It makes its first appearance in the *Elegies*, in a context similar to the one described by Ovid, involving the deception of a husband. In "Elegie I," the speaker looks back to a time when he and his mistress communicated in her husband's presence, and at his table, by means "scoffing ridles" (18), and sly touches and glances (20). In "Elegie VII," the speaker claims to have taught "The mystique language of the eye [and] hand" (4) to a woman who has now deserted him. Later in Donne's career as a writer, he will elevate such "mystique language" to a truly mystical status. In "The Exstasie" the lovers speak "soules language" (21) in a silent "dialogue of one" (74). But their claim to do so is established on the same pretext as that of the *Elegies*: hand and eye contact:

So to'entergraft our hands, as yet
 Was all the meanes to make us one,
 And pictures in our eyes to get
 Was all our propagation.

(9-12)

Thus the trivial means of flirtation transferred from Ovid to the *Elegies* becomes, in "The Exstasy," the basis of a kind of Neoplatonic love dialogue. The dialogue is Neoplatonic in the extreme, depending as it does on a state of perfect mutuality; yet still Ovidian in that it becomes a means to bring about physical love.

²² Ovid: *The Love Poems*, p.7.

The lovers' consensual gaze is a motif which generates some of Donne's most confident assertions that love is a form of shared knowledge. It provides a special occasion which elevates the lovers from the possibility of treachery or dissimulation. It must, of course, take place in a condition of physical closeness, but is superior to all other realities attendant on the situation in which it occurs. In Elegie "XIV," the speaker judges a boor's wife "(by her eye) well fitting for the feate" (14) of cuckoldry. Later in the poem a knowing glance passes between them, cutting through the mundane prattle with which the speaker goads the boor into conversation:

Alas, good sir (quoth he) *There is no doing*
In Court nor City now; she smil'd and I,
 And (in my conscience) both gave him the lie
 In one met thought:

(34-37)

Yet another Ovidian feature may be discerned in "Elegie XIV": a triangular pattern involving the speaker, his confidante, and a third party who stands outside their relationship and is wholly or partially excluded from what passes between them. In "The Exstasy," a third party overhears and understands the lovers' dialogue: one who has "by good love . . . growen all minde" (23). He is presumably to be identified with the ideal of Platonic love, since his "good love" has rendered him entirely incorporeal. Later in the poem he becomes a figure of fun. The speaker and addressee being at the point of sexual consummation, he is compelled to watch and presumably to regret his lack of a body: "To'our bodies turn wee then, that so / Weake men on love revealed may looke" (69-70). Perhaps, in this fantastic situation, Donne is recalling the smug, Ovidian adultery of his *Elegies*, and reducing the often dangerous figure of the deceived husband (or hoodwinked father) to one completely powerless to intervene. But "the triangular situation of poet, mistress and husband [that Donne] found in the *Amores*"²³ is here, in shape at least, identical with the pattern of speaker and addressee (supposed as

²³ Leishman, p.58.

intimates), and eavesdropping reader found so often in Donne's work.

5. THE ROLE OF THE ADDRESSEE

We have found that Donne's speaker is able to present seemingly consistent arguments that turn out, on closer examination, to be complex, digressive and even self-contradictory. Moreover, we have found that such arguments depend, for their articulation, on the flexibility, as to function and identity, of the speaker of a poem, its nominal addressee, and its reader: the last-named being a kind of secondary addressee, one who hears and judges the speaker's performance through asides, and may even be represented in a poem as an eavesdropper. Alternatively, the addressee may be a fixed and stabilising presence whose constant attentiveness - or even resistance - to the speaker causes us to overlook the inconsistencies within his argument. We do so because we tend to assume that all argument is dualistic: that a case must necessarily be made for or against one interpretation or course of action. This dualism is of course inherent in the two-edged potential that rhetoric was known, from antiquity, to possess. Thus, when Donne supplies an addressee whose resistance or acquiescence is constant, we imagine consistency to exist, likewise, in the words of the speaker. The effect is comparable with a conjuror's sleight-of-hand, passing unnoticed because we have been induced to look in the wrong direction. Evidently, the manipulation of the addressee is vital to the success of the speaker's performance.

I now propose to trace Donne's developing use of the addressee in terms of the extent to which he or she is included in his poems. I begin with his epigrams, since among his poems these are the briefest, the most dramatically inert, and also those that most seldom nominate any kind of addressee. Modest in dimension, epigrams nonetheless give an opportunity for much verbal ingenuity, and would doubtless have given the youthful Donne an opportunity to display his wit, without betraying any serious commitment to poetry. As such, the epigram is quite likely to have been the first poetic form with which Donne experimented. The *Elegies* are generally assigned to the mid-1590s; and the *Satyres*, evidently town-and-court poems, usually aligned with the period that began with Donne's admission to Inns of Court

and culminated with his early activities as secretary to Sir Thomas Egerton (1592-1598). Yet one of Donne's epigrams - "Fall of a wall" - refers to an incident from the battle of Corunna (1589). Topicality was presumably valued in such slight and eminently quotable pieces; and if written soon after the event, "Fall of a wall" would be one of the earliest surviving poems by Donne. Some of Donne's epigrams are, however, clearly datable to the mid-1590s; and the 1590s saw a vogue for the form, stemming from an enthusiasm for the epigrams of Martial.

Whether or not I am right in supposing Donne's poetry to have begun with the epigram, it is possible to demonstrate that the epigram is a basic building block in his poetry. Helen Gardner states that behind the poetry of Donne, Jonson and their followers "lies the classical epigram, and there is some truth that a metaphysical poem is an extended epigram"¹. Nevertheless, it seems to me that addition, rather than extension, best describes Donne's procedure when he first tries to construct substantial poems from epigrams. I intend to show that poems so constructed cannot overcome the inertia of the epigram - cannot become dramatic or rhetorical - until Donne devises techniques for linking one epigram to another. The connection, I shall argue, depends, to a considerable extent, on the invention of an addressee. Once again, this supposed auditor will be seen to play a vital part in preserving the flow and sequence of Donne's writing. I will suggest, moreover, that this function of the addressee originates from Donne's earliest prose. First, however, I want to demonstrate the value of Donne's epigrams in terms of the way he constructs his speaker.

Though trifling in themselves, Donne's epigrams are important early exercises in fusing what would normally be irreconcilable propositions into a single "true" statement. When one considers how many contradictions beset Donne - the rival claims Catholicism or Protestantism; of licentiousness and constancy; of the body and the soul - his longing to "deliver my self over in writing"² seems fated to present a nest of squabbling factions,

¹ Ed. Helen Gardner, *The Metaphysical Poets* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1957), p.18.

² Hester, p.11. An extended passage from this letter to Goodyer is quoted in my first chapter.

rather than an integrated personality. "Oh, to vex me, contraries meet in one," Donne anguishes in Holy Sonnet XIX (1). The forces that threatened the coherence of Donne's personality were much the same as those that were shattering what remained of the medieval world-view. In a famous passage from *The First Anniversary* that lumps the effects of scientific enquiry together with the breakdown of feudal hierarchy, Donne finds the world to be "in pieces, all cohaerence gone" (213). The subject of this lament might equally have been Donne himself. In the opening line of "Holy Sonnet V," Donne describes himself as "a little world" (an analogy of which he was particularly fond). But this very analogy - the notion that each human being was a microcosm of the world - was typical of the kind of thinking that was starting to be questioned by those Donne accused of breaking the world "in pieces." In his 45th Aphorism, Bacon soberly accepts the want of "cohaerence" that Donne found so depressing:

The human understanding is of its own nature prone to suppose the existence of more order and regularity in the world than it finds. And though there be many things in nature which are singular and unmatched, yet it devises for them parallels and conjugates and relatives which do not exist.³

Throughout his life Donne maintained a suspicion of the dualistic pull of disputatious language and longed to believe that beneath apparent duality there lay a quintessential and metaphysical unity. When confronted with duality he tends to resort to invective. Religious controversy is a case in point: "Is not this excuse for mere contraries / Equally strong? Cannot both sides say so?" ("Satyre III," 97-98). Another is science: "one soul thinkes one, and another way / Another thinkes, and ty's an even lay" (*The Second Anniversary*, 266-67).

One of the greatest sources of disunity in Donne's character was the rift between what he knew, or pessimistically suspected, to be true, and what hope, faith, or sheer self-protectiveness caused

³ Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum or True Suggestions for the Interpretation of Nature* (London: William Pickering, 1850) p.19.

him to wish for. Nevertheless, the extraordinary inclusiveness of Donne's mind - his "Hydroptique immoderate desire of humane learning"⁴ - made it impossible for him to ignore the diversity of knowledge and opinion that threatened his longing for unity. Thus, in order to speak of himself, and to do full justice to his complexity and confessional urge - to be "all confessing, and through-shine as I" ("A Valediction of my name, in the window," 8) - Donne needed a verbal formula that could bind contraries. To this extent, Donne was, by comparison with his most advanced contemporaries, a conservative. "Doth any man doubt," says Bacon,

that if there were taken out of men's minds vain opinions, flattering hopes, false valuations, imaginations as one would, and the like, but it would leave the minds of a number of men poor shrunken things, full of melancholy and indisposition, and unpleasing to themselves?⁵

It is remarkable how many of Donne's epigrams (of which doubtless but a small quantity survives) contrive to grant a wish, or neutralise a fear, that is recognisably his own. Often a certain amount of historical and biographical information is needed to reveal the nature of the anxiety. Such is the case with "The Jughler":

Thou call'st me effeminat, for I love women's joyes;
I call not thee manly, though thou follow boyes.

Nowadays, the accusation of being a ladies' man would hardly be taken to undermine to any man's masculinity. But in Donne's time it could be. Nicholas Breton's character, "An Effeminate Fool,"⁶ lampoons the kind of man liable "to keep among wenches." Among the follies of this "woman's man," Breton lists a proneness

⁴ Hester, p.51.

⁵ Francis Bacon, "Of Truth" in *Essays or Counsels Civil and Moral* (London: Cassell and Co., 1907) p.16.

⁶ Nicholas Breton, "An Effeminate Fool" in *The Literature of Renaissance England* ed. John Hollander and Frank Kermode (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) pp.1026-27.

to laughter (a “vice” defended in one of Donne’s *Paradoxes*), love-sickness, attending plays, sociability, and the tendency to “write verses [and] devise riddles.” Though published in 1616, when Donne was well past his youth, Breton’s compendium of foppish habits would not have seemed out of place in the 1590s. In fact it calls to mind Sir Richard Baker’s recollection of Donne as he was when he resided at the Inns of Court: “a great Visiter of Ladies, a great frequenter of Playes, a great Writer of conceited Verses.”⁷ Moreover, Breton’s fop is very like the fashionable idiots who provoke Donne’s spleen in the first and fourth of his *Satyres*. In these attention-seeking poems, Donne’s effort to distance himself from such “effeminate” men might well have been a way of advertise himself as having a more dependable temperament. Not that Donne is likely to have felt much personal anxiety if someone objected to his cosmopolitan pastimes. But to get a reputation as a man not be taken seriously by other men - to be *called* effeminate - could have damaging repercussions. Who would employ the idle, feather-brained knave of Breton’s moralising tirade? The very wording of the epigram suggests that Donne’s anxiety arises from concern over his reputation: “Thou *call’st* me effeminat.” In “Elegie IV” (“The Perfume”), it is again the accusation that counts. Here, the speaker, having crept into a burgher’s home in pursuit of his daughter, berates the “loud perfume” (40) that betrayed his presence: “By thee, the greatest staine to mans estate / Falls on us, to be called effeminate” (61-62). “Estate” refers here to men’s social and official status, as with Shakespeare’s usage in *The Merchant of Venice*: “estates, degrees, and offices.”⁸ It is thus the stain on his public self that Donne neutralises in “The Jughler.” Donne the cosmopolitan dandy - the ladies’ man, the play-goer, and the poet - was after all a “real” man by his own society’s standards. A mere dextrous turn of phrase sufficed to make him *both*.

Other epigrams reveal, on close inspection, a desire to nullify the claims and values of the outside world in accordance with the speaker’s wishes. One such epigram is “Klockius.” Having sworn never again to visit a brothel, Klockius finds that his oath

⁷ See Bald, p.72.

⁸ William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*. ed. W. Moelwyn Merchant (London: Penguin, 1967) II.ix.41.

prevents him from going home. The insinuation is of course that Klockius' marriage is a joke, since his wife is "really" a whore. For the youthful Donne monogamy was an annoying convention, barring his access - imaginative or otherwise - to whatever woman took his fancy. "[A]ll may use" ("Communitie," 12) is the catch-cry of several poems depicting constancy or marriage as contrary to the law of nature. Another epigram, "A lame begger" discredits the plea for alms of one who cannot "stand, or move." Callousness, which may be seen as a form of self-preservation, was well-developed in Donne, even by the standards of his age.⁹ In "A lame beggar," Donne glibly reassures himself that the beggar does not merit his charity: "if he say true, he *lies*."

In all three epigrams that I have mentioned, Donne discredits someone else in a manner that is potentially self-gratifying. This ploy, a favourite with him, can at the same time be used to enlist the sympathy of the reader. Whoever laughs at one of these epigrams is drawn into complicity with the speaker, and that complicity inevitably includes sharing the speaker's hostility towards another. This pattern shows how much Donne relies on his addressee, and also his adversary, for the definition of his speaker. One might go so far as to say that the speaker's self-definition is accomplished alongside his definition of the addressee and their mutual rejection of a third party; or that narrowing the focus of his rhetoric was Donne's way of scrutinising himself. A large-scale use of the process is made in "Satyre III," in which the very names of the figures whom Donne exhorts his addressee to despise bring to mind the classicising nicknames of the epigrams. "Klockius," whose renunciation of prostitutes keeps him from his wife, resembles "Phrygius," the separatist sectarian who rejects all churches, "as one / Knowing some women whores, dares marry none" (64).

So far we have found that Donne's epigrams have the self-defensive knack of deflecting another's words back on themselves. The insult of "effeminacy," Klockius' oath, a beggar's cry: each of these is some form of quotation or reported speech; and in each case what is spoken is twisted so as to seem self-contradictory. Thus, in the epigrams we have so far examined,

⁹ See Carey, pp. 94-98.

Donne's self-defensiveness consists in an ability to disarm his adversaries by creating contradiction. Other epigrams, however, strain to achieve unity in areas of experience where contradiction presents itself as an insurmountable fact. In these we find Donne beginning to articulate some of his most obsessive themes. "Pyramus and Thisbe" is a case in point:

Two, by themselves, each other, love and feare
Slaine, cruele friends, by parting have joyn'd here.

Adrift in this fluid syntax are terms that we recognize as essential to the vocabulary of the *Songs and Sonets*: "Two . . . themselves, each other . . . parting . . . joyn'd." The logic and persuasiveness needed to fuse them is as yet undeveloped. Donne depends, at this stage, on the epigram's title - and consequently the reader's erudition; for the epigram would be practically nonsensical unless one happened to know the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe from Book IV of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (a tale now best-known as the mechanicals' interlude from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Nights Dream*).

Let us suppose, however, that when Donne first composed and passed around his epigram, he deliberately omitted to supply a title. In that case, "Pyramus and Thisbe" would have been received as a riddle, and the reader set puzzling to find a subject capable of uniting so many antitheses. Now in one traditional form of riddle the solution is reached by deducing who or what it is that speaks. The form was common in Elizabethan England: it is followed in the first of three examples given under the sub-heading, "*Enigma. or the Riddle,*" in Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* (198):

It is my mother well I wot,
And yet the daughter that I begot.¹⁰

The solution to this riddle is actually two-fold. One has first to define speaker ("I"= ice), in order to conclude that "It" must be water. The full meaning of Donne's epigram is likewise, in a

¹⁰ Puttenham, p.198.

sense, a consequence of our discovery of the speaker, though here the speaker is the last to emerge. Granted that we know the subject and title of the epigram, there remains another question to be solved: What exactly is meant by "here"? For this there are two possible answers, both arising directly from Ovid's account of the myth. Ovid relates that the berry of the tree under which the lovers bled and died became purple in commemoration; and that their ashes were gathered and placed in the same funeral urn. The latter solution directs the reader to consider the word "here" as the *hic jacet* of funerary inscriptions. In response to this reading, the epigram transforms instantly to a funerary epitaph, and in the same instant the voice that had sounded in the reader's mind is reunited with the text from which it had been derived. But this final step, by which we discover that the speaker of the epigram is none other than the letters set before us on the page, continues to perplex us. Though we readily conceive that this is what has "happened," we find in practice we cannot quite bring the voice and the text together. What actually happens - if it can be described at all - is that as "here" lingers in our aural memory, we see the same word printed on the page before our eyes - and realise that they cannot, after all, be the same.

The paradox which 'Pyramus and Thisbe' forces upon the reader is the paradoxical transformation of the speaker to a text: "paradoxical" because it is precisely the opposite of our normal understanding of reading. Written language, we suppose, gives rise to the voice to which we are attentive as we read. We make this assumption because, as practised readers, we are unable to resist the formation of such a voice. "Pyramus and Thisbe," however, asks to be read, so to speak, backwards: it requires the last thing of which we become conscious as we read to be the written word, "here." But, though we understand the requirement, we cannot obey it; for we are incapable of seeing the word without hearing it.

I make this analysis of Donne's "Pyramus and Thisbe" in order to bring to light two important aspects of his speaker. Firstly, this text constitutes a "true" statement only if we are ready to believe that the speaker has died (so to speak) by transforming himself to the inanimate letters of a text which is itself an epitaph.

Secondly, this transformation of the voice to a text evidently involves an extreme diminution of the speaker's identity. Now, Donne seems to have liked the idea of becoming one of his own texts, and this transformation is only one of many that involve some loss of selfhood. When examining Donne's relationship to Ovid in the previous chapter, I gave a list of his personae that showed how often Donne tends to represent himself as something less than fully human or fully alive. In my final chapter I shall point out just how far Donne is prepared to extend this process when the woman he seeks to address has herself died. For the moment, however, I want to concentrate on the particular transformation of the speaker that occurs in "Pyramus and Thisbe." In the letter to Goodyer that I cited in my first chapter, we recall that Donne felt his need to "deliver my self over in writing" gratified by the sight of a letter to his friend lying before him on his writing table. The words "deliver my self" suggest that Donne felt he had somehow transferred his identity to ink and paper. This accomplishment brings with it a sense of relief: "a little satisfaction." It is as if Donne felt that he could relax now that the turbulent contents of his mind no longer oppressed him. There, before him, lay a text that held together his divisive complexity (the letter to Goodyer is encyclopaedic in this respect) simply by being finished and separate from him. It was now up to Goodyer to reconstruct him by re-animating his voice; but it scarcely mattered whether Goodyer actually received the letter. The important thing for Donne was to be able to feel that he had departed from himself, whole and intact, as the soul departs from the body. That such was indeed the kind of release that Donne sought through writing is confirmed in the same letter to Goodyer: "as I would every day provide for my souls last convoy . . . so for these extasies in letters, I often deliver myself over in writing."

Another of Donne's epigrams that records the transformation of the speaker to a text is "Niobe":

By childrens births, and death, I am become
So dry, that I am now my owne sad tombe.

This particular metamorphosis is certainly Ovidian, since it is described in Book VI of the *Metamorphoses*. It is, moreover, not unlike the transformation of the speaker of "Twicknam Garden" to "a stone fountaine weeping out my year" (18); though an even closer comparison can be made with "A Nocturnall," in which the despondent speaker is so thoroughly "dead" as to be unable to speak except as his own "Epitaph" (9). At its centre lies a decidedly emblematic figure: a weeping stone, a figure which *is* Niobe. Here, perhaps, is the first of the many emblematic guises assumed by Donne's speaker.

As with "Pyramus and Thisbe," the speaker of "Niobe" is the epigram itself, since no other choice or combination of words could suppress the reader's logical or commonness objections. If Niobe is dead, then she should not be able to speak; nor is weeping really the same as giving birth; nor can Niobe - or anyone - be "mine owne sad tomb"; nor, for that matter, do tombs feel sad. The paradoxes and absurdities of "Niobe" ought, then, to resist articulation, and the reader is surprised to find that they do not. Such astonishment is frequently our response to reading Donne, and is precisely the effect he aims for. In "The Dissolution," the speaker, wrought like Niobe of paradoxes and yet speaking them, makes a wry aside: "This (which I am amazed that I can speake)" (19).

I wish now to consider what happens when Donne attempts to build a more substantial poem from a series of epigrammatic paradoxes. Such an attempt may be seen in "The Paradox,"¹¹ of which a short excerpt will reveal the awkwardness of this method:

No Lover saith, I love, nor any other

¹¹ I can, of course, only assume that this is a very early poem, since it is impossible to give even an approximate date for most of the *Songs and Sonets*. Nevertheless, its halting rhythm sets it apart from every other poem in the set. Moreover, its penultimate couplet - "Once I lov'd and dyed; and am become / Mine Epitaph and Tombe" - is strongly reminiscent of the epigram, "Niobe." Stylistically, "The Paradox" is very close to "Elegie II" ("The Anagram"), which is likewise constructed from epigrammatic units and has many end-stopped lines. The *Elegies* are generally assumed to be early works, and "Elegie II" seems a very juvenile exercise in anti-Petrarchism. Perhaps Donne wrote both poems shortly after being admitted to Lincoln's Inn.

Can judge a perfect Lover;
 Hee thinkes that else none can or will agree,
 That any loves but hee:
 I cannot say I lov'd, for who can say
 Hee was kill'd yesterday.

(1-6)

Each two-line unit is essentially discrete, and the poem as a whole remains as inert as its component parts. The effort to achieve continuity by mere addition has resulted in jarring displacements of the speaker's voice. Donne cannot decide whether to speak *as* or *about* his paradoxical lover, as is evident from the confusing alternation between the pronouns "I" and "hee"; an alternation which is likely to have been necessitated by the way each paradox demanded to be phrased.

What, then, is to be done with such epigrammatic units if they are at least to *seem* consistent with the voice of a single persona, and so constitute a continuous discourse? Donne's solution, I shall argue, lay in his adaptation to poetry of certain rhetorical tricks whose earliest use is to be found in the prose *Paradoxes and Problems*. This collection of frivolous dialectical exercises were lumped together in a pirated edition entitled *Juvenilia*, published in 1632. The title cannot be taken too literally, since, according to Bald, most of the *Problems* were written after Donne took up residence in Mitcham in 1606.¹² But many of the *Paradoxes* are early - some perhaps very early indeed. The influential *Paradossi* (1543) of Ortensio Lando were translated into English in 1593. But we need not assume that this is when Donne first became acquainted with the genre, as there were numerous published collections available to English readers during the later sixteenth century. Moreover, it is quite possible that Donne was travelling in Spain and Italy for some unspecifiable time before his admittance to Thavies Inn in 1591.¹³ In Italy, Donne would have encountered the tradition of humorous paradoxical writing first-hand, and it is conceivable that on his return to England he chose to write paradoxes in order to display himself as a well-travelled

¹² See Bald, p.200.

¹³ See Carey, p.22.

sophisticate. The possibility that Donne was abroad until some time before 1591, the year of his admission to Thavies Inn, receives support from an engraved portrait, dated to that year, which depicts the eighteen-year-old Donne. Its motto "*antes muertes que mudado*" ("sooner dead than changed") is Spanish, and, besides hinting at Catholic sympathies, suggests a desire to be associated with the glamour of mainland European culture.¹⁴

The importance, for this study, of Donne's *Paradoxes* lies in the way they achieve an energetic rhetorical flow by being directed either against those presumed to oppose them, or in accordance with those whom the speaker imagines as sharing his own ethos. Thus, in these works, we may locate the origin of two characteristic functions of Donne's addressee: the one adversarial, and the other consensual. Previously in this study I have pointed to drama as a source for the speech-mimicry of Donne's poetry. Here, I wish to dwell on the importance of his early prose in this respect. It is, for one thing, obviously much easier to imitate speech by writing prose, than by writing poetry. But, more importantly, the prose of Donne's *Paradoxes* animates the false syllogisms typical of Donne's *Epigrams* by dividing the two parts of these syllogisms in such a way that the first proposition is deemed to be the opinion of Donne's *adversarius*, while the conclusion is deduced by the speaker. We have already encountered this method of splitting the false two-part syllogism in the *epigrams* themselves. In the *Paradoxes*, however the method is extended, and the succession of syllogisms is presented with far greater clarity than one finds in the clumsy additive process of "The Paradox." I am thus suggesting, as a useful generalisation, that an incorporation of the epigram within the rhetorical flow achieved in the *Paradoxes* lies at the heart of Donne's poetic technique.

A passage from Donne's paradox, "That Women Ought to Paint Themselves," gives a clear instance of how much the vitality of Donne's invective owes to the construction an adversarial addressee:

¹⁴ The engraving is reproduced in Bald (Plate 1).

What thou lovest most in her face is colour, and this painting gives that. But thou hatest it not because it is, but because thou knowest it.

Fool, whom only ignorance makes happy! The stars, the sun, the sky which thou admirest, alas have no colour, but are fair because they seem coloured. If this seeming will not satisfy thee in her, thou hast good assurance of her colour when thou seest her lay it on. If her face be painted upon a board or a wall, thou wilt love it, and the board, and the wall. Canst thou loath it then, when it smiles, speaks and kisses, because it is painted? Is not the earth's face in the most pleasing season new painted? Are we not more delighted with seeing fruits and birds and beasts painted than with the naturals? And do we not with pleasure behold the painted shapes of devils and monsters, whom we durst not regard?¹⁵

The analogy between visual art and cosmetics, which crops up several times in this passage, is one that Donne also uses in an epigram, "Phryne":

Thy flattering picture, *Phryne*, is like thee,
Onely in this, that you both painted be.

But there is a subtle difference, between the epigram and the prose paradox, in the way Donne handles this analogy. To understand this difference is to locate a technical means by which Donne converts the inert material of the epigram into a flow of energetic prose.

In the epigram a false syllogism is expressed through a pun: Phryne's portrait is painted; she, too, is "painted"; and to that extent Phryne and her portrait are alike. How might this epigram - complete and self-contained as it is - have been extended into a longer poem? If Donne had opted for the additive technique of "The Paradox," he might well have been obliged to construct his next couplet in such a way that Phryne ceased to be addressed: perhaps a male addressee would have been invoked

¹⁵ John Donne, "That Women Ought to Paint Themselves" in *No man is an island: A selection from the prose of John Donne* ed. Rivers Scott (London: Folio Society, 1997) p.3.

and commanded - with the aid of spurious logic - to admire Phryne as he would her "flattering picture." Next, there may have followed a mock-philosophical reflection on the allure and superficiality of all outward beauty. With each new couplet, Donne would have been taken up with the problem of forcing a syllogism to fit a decasyllabic couplet, a procedure that almost inevitably makes for end-stopped lines.

In the prose paradox, by contrast, the first step in the syllogism is deemed to be the opinion of the speaker's adversary. He, being literal-minded, must grant the more obvious and literal significance of "painted," and must supposedly concede that if the painted thing is his mistress' portrait, he will love it. The second, and wittier, use of the word is contributed by the speaker alone; he thus emerges as the more ingenious of the two, and concludes the syllogism, proving to his adversary that he ought not to be put off by his mistress' use of cosmetics. This simple trick of attributing an opinion to an adversary in order to twist it to his own purposes, is a favourite with Donne. It is, for one thing, a method for transforming the two-way process of disputation into an unbroken monologue. In addition, it allows the speaker to voice an opinion while simultaneously disowning it.

Another of Donne's *Paradoxes*, "That Old Men Are More Fantastic than Young," makes sustained use of the reader or auditor as a consensual addressee, thus setting the addressee and the speaker against a third party held to be in disagreement with both of them:

They tax us with inconstancy, which in themselves young they allowed, so that, reproving that which they did approve, their inconstancy exceeds ours because they have changed once more than we. Yea, they are more idly busied in conceiting apparel than we, for we, when we are melancholy, wear black; when lusty, green; when forsaken, tawny: pleasing our own inward affections, leaving them to others indifferent. But they prescribe laws and constrain the noble, the scholar, the merchant and all estates to certain habits.¹⁶

¹⁶ Ibid. p4.

I wish now to relate my discussion of Donne's manipulation of the addressee and the *adversarius* (who may, or may not be, one and the same) to his *Satyres*. These contain extended passages of rhetoric, constructed very much in the manner of the passages which I have cited from the *Paradoxes*. In the *Satyres*, we also find the use of dramatic dialogue. This proves, in a sense, a failure, since it allows the *adversarius* to overwhelm the speaker, and consequently destroys the latter's monopoly of dialectic.

The *Satyres* and the *Elegies* are the only poems in Donne's output which contain passages of direct speech. In "Satyre I" there is even a miniature dialogue:

Now leaps he upright, Joggs me, and cryes, Do you see
Yonder well favoured youth? Which? Oh, 'tis hee
That dances so divinely; Oh, said I,
Stand still, must you dance here for company?

(83-8)

This is highly amusing, and we might regret that Donne did not choose to exploit it more thoroughly. Yet if we read through "Satyre I" it becomes obvious why he did not. The poem's rhythmic pace must suddenly slacken to accommodate the tiny silences implied in the change from one speaker to another. Moreover, the advent of another voice seems intrusive, entering as it does in the midst of a first-person narrative with such a personal texture. To read "Satyre III," with its tremendous vernacular energy, is to realise how little Donne could afford such a digression.

"Satyre III" articulates the search for "true religion" (43). But it is also, in a sense, searching for an ideal addressee, one who will share the speaker's ardour for "our Mistress, fair Religion" (5). Yet the search for an addressee seems even less conclusive than the poem's celebrated method for attaining the truth. Who, one wonders, can the speaker be addressing if that person is unlike either Mirreus, Crants, Graius, Phrygius, or Gracchus? These figures seem to represent every possible contemporary attitude to Christianity, and yet not only is the addressee supposed to avoid them, but to "stand inquiring right" (78) - a stance which somehow involves going "about . . . and about" (81). To make

things more confusing, the addressee's task of finding "true religion" seem at times to be a rather conservative business. He is told to 'aske thy father' (71). Earlier in the poem, the father-figure had been able to offer "easie wayes and neare / To follow" (14 - 15). Later, however these "wayes" are described as "Cragg'd and steep" (80). The problem is duplicated in "our Mistress, faire Religion"; for who might she be if she is neither Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran, or Anglican?

Nevertheless, these problems only emerge if we are prepared to subject the poem to a synthetic analysis that ignores the fact that its ideas are sequential. Moreover, the sequential nature of these ideas suggests that Donne is addressing his own perplexity. He is both sceptical and obsessed with the longing to find unity in religion, and he dramatises this problem by constructing an addressee and a series of adversarial figures, much as he does in the *Paradoxes*.

Often, in the *Satyres*, the speaker finds himself in a public space where he feels ill-at-ease. His sense of personal danger is sometimes expressed in terms of the current hostility towards Catholics. This is hardly surprising, as Donne was himself brought up Catholic and would only recently have begun to distance himself from the Faith at about the time when the *Satyres* were written. In 1597, Donne became secretary to the Lord Keeper, Sir Thomas Egerton, and would, in order to hold such a position, have needed to be beyond reproach in religious matters. In "Satyre V," Donne alludes to his new responsibility, as Egerton's secretary, for helping to "weed out" (34) Court corruption. In "Satire IV," however, his depiction of a visit to the Court is figuratively embellished with allusions to specifically Catholic beliefs and practice. Perhaps at the time of writing Donne still had reason to be fearful of being suspected as a recusant. If this is the case, then such a fear, with its attendant need for secrecy, is converted in "Satire IV" to a bold flaunting of heretical belief. Such bravado is comparable, in its subversiveness, to Donne's licentious, Ovidian pose in the *Elegies*. Later in life, Donne would come to regret this bravado. In a letter to Wotton, he observes that "to my satyrs there belongs some fear ... & to some of my elegies."¹⁷ The "fear"

¹⁷ See Bald, p.121.

probably arose from the possibility that the circulation of these poems in manuscript might bring them to the attention of readers less tolerant than Donne's coterie audience. In the opening lines of "Satyre IV" the Catholic belief in Purgatory and the severe financial penalty for attending Mass are invoked to express the speaker's sense horror, unease, and even *sin*, as he recalls his visit to the Court:

Well; I may now receive, and die; My sinne
 Indeed is great, but I have beene in
 A Purgatorie, such as fear'd hell is
 A recreation, and scant map of this.

 [I] went to Court; But as Glaze which did goe
 To'a Masse in jest, catch'd, was faine to disburse
 The hundred markes, which is the Statutes curse,
 Before he scapt; So'it pleas'd my destinie
 (Guilty of my sin of going), to thinke me
 As prone to all ill, and of good as forget -
 full, as proud, as lustfull, and as much in debt,
 As vaine, as witlesse, and as false as they
 Which dwell at Court,

(1-16)

The poem is leading up to the first punishment prescribed by the speaker's guilty "destinie." An astonishingly foolish and talkative courtier - an irrepressible Osric - corners him and presumes to converse as one learned man with another:

He saith, Sir,
 I love your judgement; Whome doe you prefer,
 For the best linguist? And I seelily
 Said, that I thought Calepines Dictionarie;

(51-54)

The speaker's ironic word-play has no effect on his determined interlocutor. In fact the latter soon shows that he is only looking for a pretext to ramble about his great gifts as a linguist.

He stopt mee, and said; Nay, your Apostles were
 Good pretty linguists, and so Panurge was;
 Yet a poore gentleman; all these may passe
 By travaile. Then, as if he would have sold
 His tongue, he praised it,

(58-62)

The fop's tongue becomes increasingly dangerous, stuffing the speaker's ears with slanderous gossip which he would rather not hear. The speaker fears that he will be thought guilty by association: "mee thought I saw / one of our Giant Statutes ope his jaw / To sucke me in; for hearing him" (131-133). In this hostile, public space the speaker has scarcely the liberty to open his mouth.

The speaker's assured pose in most of the *Elegies* and the *Songs and Sonets* contrasts markedly with his failure of self-assertion in "Satyre IV." It may simply be that one is a compensation for the other. In real life Donne was obliged to compete for favour and patronage, and had doubtless to endure many less talented individuals who were simply trying to do the same thing. But in the private world of poetry he could live out fantasies of power. Those whom he chose to address could be made attentive, approving, or submissive. Imaginary opponents could be harangued with impunity. He could even separate out one side of his divided personality and play devil's advocate for the other. Yet, however he chose to focus what he wished to say, Donne was always conscious of what might be said against him. His training in the law and his lengthy enquiry into the rival claims of Protestantism and Catholicism can only have increased his awareness of the fact, known to any Elizabethan grammar-school boy, that rhetoric can be enlisted to defend either side of an argument. Accordingly, he needed some means of rendering the opposition harmless. But Donne could never quite forgo the stimulus he derived from imagining an opponent's point-of-view. To this extent he resembled Montaigne:

The most fruitful and most natural exercise of the mind, in my opinion, is conversation . . . If I converse with an understanding man, and a rough disputant, he presses hard

upon me, and pricks me on both sides; his imaginations raise up mine to more than ordinary pitch; jealousy, glory, and contention, stimulate and raise me up to something above myself; and concurrence is a quality totally offensive in discourse.¹⁸

Conversation, however, was not really adaptable to Donne's poetic practice. There had of course been poems constructed in dialogue form, and Donne might have used these as models if he had chosen to do so. Sidney's *Arcadia* is an obvious example, as is Spenser's *The Shepherdes Calender*. But the only poem by Donne that uses this form is the *Eclogue* that he wrote to celebrate the marriage of the Earl of Somerset to Lady Frances Howard.

The reason, I suspect, why Donne did not favour the dialogue form is that his poems derive their momentum from the rhythms of speech. We have already noted, in the *Satyres*, the awkwardness of his attempts to combine dialogue with monologue. In the *Songs and Sonets* such attempts would seem even more incongruous, since the forms of these poems are so well-adapted to represent the rhythms of speech. In any case, it was not usual for a single lyric to have more than one speaker, although Wyatt, in "They Flee from Me," and, to a greater extent, Spenser, in Sonnet 75 of *Amoretti* both report the speech of a woman. Spenser's sonnet is in fact genuinely dialogical, though it is his persona who has the last word. These poems, however, are narrated largely in the past-tense, and this in practice makes reported speech unobtrusive: Spenser's "sayd she" (5) and "(quod I)" (9) fit neatly within such a narrative. By contrast, in the *Songs and Sonets* there is hardly any use of the past tense, and considerable use of the future. This obviously relates to the fact that the *Songs and Sonets* are, in general, to be thought of as spoken rather than narrated. Thus, for stylistic reasons alone, these poems would be hard put to indicate dialogue through reported speech.

There is, however, one poem in the set which depends heavily on the idea that dialogue is taking place, "The Canonization." This

¹⁸ Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, "Of the Art of Conference" in *The Essays of Michel Eyquem de Montaigne* trans. Charles Cotton ed. W. Carew Hazlitt (London: Britannica, 1952) p.446.

begins with a forthright attempt to silence the interlocutor: "For Godsake hold your tongue." Yet, on the evidence of what is said in the poem, it becomes apparent that the interlocutor has not been silenced by the opening command. In fact, if the poem is to make sense, the reader must assume that the interlocutor has not only provoked the argument, but that he continues to harass the speaker, since each stanza (except the last) begins as the speaker's attempt to reassert himself. This procedure is comparable with that of "The Flea," in which the woman's actions - her searching for the flea and then killing it - are conceived as taking place in the pause between stanzas, and provoke comments from the speaker in the stanzas themselves. I quote the poem in full, along with a rough indication of what the interlocutor might have said:

Your love is foolish, and you will suffer for it.

For Godsake hold your tongue and let me love,
 Or chide my palsie, or my gout,
 My five grey haire, or ruin'd fortune flout,
 With wealth your state, your minde with Arts improve,
 Take you a course, get you a place,
 Observe his honour, or his grace,
 Or the King's reall, or his stamped face
 Contemplate, what you will, approve,
 So you will let me love.

Love is a harmful preoccupation.

Alas, alas, who's injur'd by my love?
 What merchants ships have my sighs drown'd?
 Who saies my teares have overflow'd his ground?
 When did my colds a forward spring remove?
 When did the heats which my veines fill
 Add one more to the plagueie Bill?
 Soldiers finde warres, and lawyers finde out still
 Litigious men, which quarrels move,
 Though she and I do love.

Some unspecified insult directed against the speaker and his lover.

Call us what you will, wee are made such by love;
 Call her one, mee another flye,
 We're Tapers too, and at our owne cost die,
 And wee in us finde the'Eagle and the dove,
 The Phoenix ridle hath more wit
 By us, we two being one are it.
 So, to one neutrale thing both sexes fit,
 Wee dye and rise the same, and prove
 Mysterious by this love.

You cannot live (i.e. survive in this world) by love.

Wee can dye by it, if not live by love,
 And if unfit for tombes and hearse
 Our legend bee, it will be fit for verse;
 And if no peece of Chronicle wee prove,
 We'll build in sonnets pretty roomes;
 As well a well wrought urne becomes
 The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombes,
 And by these hymnes, all shall approve
 Us *Canoniz'd* for Love.

And thus invoke us; You whom reverend love
 Made one anothers hermitage
 You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage,
 Who did the whole worlds soule contract, and drove
 Into the glasses of your eyes
 So made such mirrors, and such spies,
 That they did all to you epitomize,
 Countries, Townes, Courts: Beg from above
 A patterne of our love.

These interpolations are, of course, absurd; but this is partly because what the speaker has to say is so far in excess of anything that could have prompted him to say it. The reader can form only a vague idea of what the interlocutor might have said, and this of great advantage in terms of the freedom it grants to

the speaker's response. One is reminded here of the adversarial figures of "Satyre III," who seem to justify the speaker's invective, and yet constitute such a nebulous position when their opinions are combined. By the end of stanza four the speaker is in a position to appropriate the interlocutor's voice. This is achieved by nothing more than a quibble relating the word "sonnets" to "hymnes." The imperative, "Thus invoke us," introduces the final paean in which the speaker is dictating the words of the interlocutor. The latter has become a congregation, saying - indeed singing (Cf. l. 34) - an invocation to the canonized lovers. By assuming the interlocutor's voice (now rendered plural in its assent), the speaker effectively forces an admission that the objections raised in stanzas one and two are invalid; for the lovers supposedly "epitomize" all worldly concerns - "countries, towns, courts" - within the confines of their mutual gaze.

The interlocutor's identity is in fact very close to that of the speaker, despite the polarity which is stressed - in fact produced - by the poem's implied dialogue. This is because of the evident similarity of their social status and values; a similarity which is not contested, but deemed irrelevant to the speaker's private feelings. Moreover, though seeming to disparage the interlocutor and his conventional values, Donne needs both the interlocutor and these values in order to articulate his own position.

"The Canonization" might thus be called a "dialogue of one" in which the interlocutor is in fact a manifestation of Donne himself.

6. ABSENCE

In "A Valediction forbidding mourning," Donne supposes that true lovers can "admit / Absence," though he concedes that "eyes, lips, hands" (20) will still be missed to some extent. Here, the lovers are still in contact as the poem's words are spoken, and will, supposedly, remain so, thanks to the speaker's verbal ingenuity. Yet other, possibly earlier poems dealing with separation between lovers are flippant, even insincere; and in these the conceits associated with the denial of separation may be derided. In "Elegie XVI," the speaker tells the woman that during his absence she should "feed on this flatterie / That absent lovers one in th'other be" (25-26). Death figures prominently as a metaphor in most poems about parting, including those which anticipate the end of an affair (the distinction is sometimes ambiguous; and the sexual meaning of "die" may be present in either case).

In the *Songs and Sonets*, three poems deal with the actual or possible death of a woman. In "A Feaver," the woman ("thou") is addressed in the first three and last two stanzas, but otherwise referred to as "she." This may be taken as a dramatisation of the speaker's fear of losing her. Yet the last stanza is perhaps flippant, since it equates the possibility of her death with the idea of inconstancy. Accordingly, her fever becomes a metaphor for the speaker's possessive desire:

Yet 'twas of my minde, seising thee,
 Though it in thee cannot persever,
 For I had rather owner bee
 Of thee one houre all else ever.
 (25-28)

In "The Dissolution," the situation is altogether more serious. The poem begins with the forthright statement, "Shee's dead." The speaker makes no attempt to apostrophise the dead woman, though he might perhaps have done so by invoking her spirit. Instead, he delivers a strange soliloquy, in which one notes a marked tendency to develop ideas through word-association, and

relatively little use of the logical connectives typical of Donne's poetry (perhaps because there is no-one here to persuade). These tendencies may be illustrated by comparing the opening of the poem with a stanza from "The Extasie," in which the semblance of logic is far more convincing:

Shee's dead; And all which die
 To their first Elements resolve;
 And wee were mutuall Elements to us,
 And made of one another.
 My body then doth hers involve,
 And those things whereof I consist, hereby
 In me abundant grow, and burdenous,
 And nourish not but smother.

(1-7)

Wee then, who are this new soule, know,
 Of what we are compos'd, and made,
 For, th'Atomies of which we grow,
 Are soules, whom no change can invade

(45-48)

"The Dissolution," has an improvised quality. Of the *Songs and Sonets*, only "The Apparition" and "Womans Constancy" consist, likewise, of a single stanza; the latter poems, however, do not employ the delayed rhymes of "The Dissolution" and read far more briskly. And yet the static quality of "The Dissolution" makes it appropriately brooding. The fantasy of involving the woman with the speaker so that no breach can supposedly occur between them takes an unusual form - "My body then does her involve" - based on Aristotelian and alchemical theories concerning the unity of matter. No mention is made here of "Our two souls. . . which are one" ("A Valediction forbidding mourning," 21), a Neoplatonic doctrine often found in poems dealing with less serious or permanent kinds of separation.

The third and most important of the *Songs and Sonets* with which I am concerned with here is "A nocturnall upon S. Lucies day." Here again, no attempt is made to apostrophise the dead

woman, save perhaps in a short section (23-27) in the past tense, in which she and the speaker are signified by the pronoun "we." (The word cannot be assumed to imply that he is addressing *her*.) Nor does the speaker try to say that he and she are part of an indissoluble whole, resisting separation. Instead, he takes the daring step of identifying himself, not with of some transcendent or even material connection with the absent woman, but with the very nature of absence, with nothingness. This decision relates to the belief that God had made the world immediately out of nothing; a belief which, we recall, was invoked in "The Storme" and "The Calme," in order to figure its addressee as Donne's Creator. In "A nocturnall," however, there is no intimate addressee, and without her Donne undergoes an alchemical metamorphosis, becoming 'the Elixir' (29) - paradoxically, the vital element - of "the first nothing" (29); that is, of the dead nothingness that preceded God's creative *fiat*. Such a state has already been described, in the poem, as compounded, alchemically, "[o]f absence, darknesse, death; things which are not" (17). The love which "wrought" this "new Alchimie" (13), has thus an opposite effect from the answered, reciprocal love by which the speaker and addressee of the more optimistic love lyrics affirm and maintain one another's life and being. In "The good-morrow," the speaker asserts that "none can die" (21) if he and his beloved strive to love equally; and in "The Exstasie" the lovers' two souls combine to form a single "abler soule" (43), impervious to destruction because, unlike the Aristotelian body/soul compound, none of its component parts is material: "th'Atomies of which we grow, / Are soules, whom no change can invade" (47-48).

In in a verse letter "To Sir Henry Wotton," Donne claims that without his correspondent he would be transformed from living to dead matter: "I should wither in one day, and passe / To'a bottle'of Hay, that am a locke of Grasse" (5-6). Such a transition would involve the separation from matter of the first-infused and most basic part of the tripartite Aristotelian soul: the "vegetable" soul. This diminutive "death of the author" must be seen in terms of the verse letter's *raison d'être* as part of a protracted written conversation: to make "friends absent speake" (2). For all the power that Donne here, as so often, attributes to his own

words, his function - and, to that extent, existence - as an author would cease without this opportunity to exercise that power by charming away the gap separating himself and his friend. Similarly, in poems which describe the speaker's imminent departure from his lover, his words act as a charm against absence by virtue of their persuasive effect on the woman he leaves.

In "A nocturnall," however, "absence" has actually come about, undeniably and irrevocably, through the woman's death. Accordingly, the speaker descends through a complex *scala natura*, "withering," more drastically than in the verse letter to Wotton, from a man to a state less existent than nothingness itself. The diminution is first hinted in a retrospective passage that supposes the lovers' occasional laxness - their showing "Care to ought else" - to have reduced them to "two Chaosses" (25-26). Whereas, in "The good-morrow," the lovers made up a single, composite "world" (14), here discord splits them into "*two* Chaosses," and reverses the sequence of Creation to make each resemble the world when it was "without form, and void"¹ Next, in this retrospective passage, the occasional "absences" of the couple from one-another are supposed to have brought about the regression to dead matter familiar from the verse letter to Wotton: "often absences / Withdrew our soules, and made us carcasses" (27). But this still-figurative death gives way, with the start of the fourth stanza and its sudden resumption of the present tense, to a realisation that the woman is actually dead, and a plainly desperate attempt to deny the fact. This brings its train the most extreme figuration of his own non-existence that the speaker can devise:

But I am by her death, (which word wrongs her)
Of the first nothing, the Elixer grown;

(28-29)

The the term "Elixir" is presumably to be understood as an ultimate stage in the reversal of Creation, one which Donne has specially devised for himself by drawing on the poem's other

¹ Gen.1.2

major source of imagery, alchemy. Earlier in the poem the speaker claimed to have been "ruin'd" (17) - an alchemical term signifying the breakdown into elements - "From dull privations, and leane emptiness" (16). This destructive transformation is essentially restated when Donne comes to describe the effect of the woman's death on the speaker. "Death," too, has an alchemical significance; it refers to the destruction or neutralisation of chemical substances, and is synonymous with the term "mortification" employed by Jonson in *The Alchemist*.² In this sense, "death" was an essential stage in a process that would, it was hoped, culminate in the production of the philosopher's stone. This could supposedly transform base metals to gold, and was closely identified with, and even termed, "the elixir." But before the elixir - or the stone - could be produced, another transformation had to succeed mortification: vivification.³ Moreover, the elixir, through association with the medicinal *Elixir Vitae*, was supposed capable of indefinitely prolonging life. Donne reverses these generative aspects of alchemy in accordance with his imagery of descent through the *scala natura*. Thus, the speaker of "A Nocturnal" is *born* of nothingness: "re-begot / Of . . . things which are not" (17-18); and is, moreover, "every dead thing" (12).

The fullest account of the speaker's descent through the *scala natura* is given immediately after his recollection of the woman's actual death. This provokes the extreme figurative consequence of his being less than nothing:

Were I a man, that I were one,
I needs must know, I should preferre,
If I were any beast,
Some ends, some means; Yea plants, yea stones detest,
And love, all, all some properties invest,
If I an ordinary nothing were,
As shadow, a light, and body must be here.

But I am None;

² See Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*, ed. J.B. Steane (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967) II.iv.25.

³ *Ibid.*, II.iv.24.

(30-37)

The speaker seems to compete with the dead woman through the intensity of his death-wish. In "The Good-morrow," the lovers had striven to keep one-another alive; but now an opposite exertion is required: an active longing for death, or rather, the complete negation of the self. Such a desperate longing is inevitably associated with suicide. "I have often had such a sickly inclination," confesses Donne in the preface to his treatise in defence of suicide, *Biathanatos*.⁴

Extreme melancholy is often found to be linked, in Donne's writing, with anxiety concerning his separation from society (specifically London society), and from his friends. Such melancholy is evident in a letter to Goodyer written from Mitcham, at a time when Donne was living in relative poverty and cut off from the centre of power, in which he longed once again to find work: "The pleasantness of the season displeases me. Everything refreshes, and I wither, and I grow older and not better"⁵. Here, the indifference to benign surroundings recalls the subjective desolation of "Twicknam Garden," and the sense of diminishing vitality is the mood of "A Nocturnall." That poem's fantasy of self-annihilation appears in another letter to Goodyer from Mitcham, once again lamenting Donne's want of a secure and profitable role in society. "[T]o be no part of any body," is, Donne insists, to be "nothing";⁶ and further on in the letter he discloses a longing for death that is, he intimates, dangerously immoderate:

at this hour I am Nothing, or so little, that I am scarce subject
and argument good enough for one of mine own letters; yet I
fear, that doth not ever proceed from a good cause, that I am so
well content to be less, that is dead.⁷

⁴ John Donne, *Biathanatos* (excerpts) in *John Donne* ed. John Carey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) p.149.

⁵ Gosse, *Letters* vol.1 p.185.

⁶ *Ibid.*, vol.1 p. 191.

⁷ *Ibid.*, vol.1 p. 191.

If Donne's death-wish proceeds not from "a good cause" - by which he clearly means a hope of the next life (to which the letter has already made allusion) - then Goodyer is free to imagine the degree of irreligious despair implied by the unstated *bad* cause. A suicidal tendency would, of course, be an extreme reading; but it is not uncommon for seriously depressed persons to attract sympathy by advertising such a tendency. What is important here is that fantasies of death go hand-in-hand with Donne's sense of isolation, including the isolation from those he holds dear. In a letter dated by Hester to the summer of 1610, Donne writes, from his lodgings in London, to a young woman (Bridget White) who is absent from the city during a time of plague. "Your going away," he claims, "hath made London a dead carkasse"; he himself would be among the dead, "but that a hope that I have a room in your favour keeps me alive."⁸ This "hope," he goes on to say, depends on her favourable response to his letters; of which she has given no indication, since she has not replied to the six that he has already sent. Love or friendship - its is unclear which is implied here - is what keeps Donne "alive" by suspending his deadly brooding on isolation and inconsequence.

We have come, as it were, full circle. The intimacy between the speaker and the addressee implied in Donne's "The Storme" has, in "A nocturnall," been shattered by the death - imaginary or otherwise - of an intimate with whom Donne can no longer communicate. True to his word, Donne reverses the Creation analogy implied in both "The Storme" and "The Calme" by figuring himself, to the most extreme extent that he can devise, as "nothing." Whatever the actual circumstances (if indeed there were any) that prompted Donne to write "A nocturnall," we can, I believe, see this poem as an attempt to dramatize the anxiety that underscores his need for communication. Given his fondness for portraying physical love as a kind of communication, Donne could hardly have devised a fitter situation by which to express this anxiety than the death of a beloved woman. I am suggesting, therefore, that the dead woman of "A nocturnal" is a composite figure. Her identity is as fugitive, in its way, as that of any of

⁸ Hester, pp.1-2.

Donne's addressees: friend, patrons, coterie readers, real or imaginary women - all of them to some extent targets on which Donne could focus his overriding need to "deliver my self over in writing."

The year 1627 saw the death of Donne's old patron, Lucy, Countess of Bedford. It was, in general, a year of bereavement. Only a month earlier, Donne had lost his lifelong friend, Sir Henry Goodyer; later in the same year he would lose his daughter, Lucy (named after the Countess). 1627 would be an exceptionally late date for Donne to have written any poetry. Nevertheless, it would not be out of character for him to have commemorated all these persons in a poem dedicated to St. Lucy, namesake of the Countess, patron saint of sight, and, according to her significance in the poem, a figure of the approaching light and renewal of the Resurrection. Alternatively, the poem may have been written in response to the death of his wife, Anne, in 1617. But since Anne was frail and frequently pregnant, Donne must often have imagined her death long before it actually occurred. If, however, "A nocturnall" involves a fantasy of the death of Lady Bedford, as might be conjectured from its title, then this apparently heart-felt poem may owe a good deal to the sycophantic verse letters that he wrote to her. One of these, "To the Countesse of Bedford On New-yeares day" begins, "This twilight of two years, nor past, nor next, / Some embleme is of mee, or I of this." These lines immediately recall the opening of "A nocturnall": "Tis the yeares midnight, and it is the dayes." Donne obviously wrote the verse letter at a time when he enjoyed the Countess's favour, since its second stanza alludes to a gift of money that has cleared his debts. But in 1611, Donne sought and gained the patronage of Sir Robert Drury by publishing the first of the two *Anniversaries*, which commemorate the death of Sir Robert's daughter, Elizabeth, whom Donne had never met. This transference of allegiance, along with the hyperbolical praise of Elizabeth Drury in the *Anniversaries* (the second of which was published in 1612), may have upset the Countess.⁹ In an attempt to placate her feelings, Donne began a verse letter to her while travelling through France with his new patron. Though this was never

⁹ See Bald, pp.274-77.

finished, it is clear from what Donne managed to write that he sought to make amends by claiming that his praise of Elizabeth Drury belonged, by rights, to Lady Bedford. This verse letter, subsequently titled "To the Countess of Bedford Begun in France but never perfected," has, like Countess' New Year's Day epistle, a verbal parallel with "A nocturnall." It begins with the words, "Though I be dead and buried." Donne intends to signify that he is not at all happy to be abroad - cut off, as he is, from the Countess and the English Court which she personifies. In the first stanza of "A nocturnall" we find a phrase very similar to "dead and buried":

The worlds whole sap is sunke:
The generall balme th'hydroptique earth hath drunk,
Whither, as to the beds-feet life is shrunke,
Dead and enterr'd,

(5-8)

Perhaps the resemblance is merely coincidental. But if Donne had the Countess in mind when he composed "A nocturnall," and if that poem was composed later than the two verse letters, then it would not be surprising if he borrowed, perhaps unconsciously, from poems that he had addressed to her.

The passage from "A nocturnall" that I have just cited also brings to mind the underlying conceit of the first of Donne's *Anniversaries*. Elizabeth Drury, since she is the world's soul, leaves the world dead by departing from it. In "The Second Anniversary," Elizabeth's death is compared with the setting of the sun. She is deemed to be "the Sunnes Sunne" (4), hyperbolically distinguished from the sun itself ("this lower worlds" [4]). In "A nocturnall" we find a similar distinction drawn between "my Sunne" (37) - identified with the dead woman - and "the lesser sun" (38) which, unlike "my Sunne," will once again "renew" (37) with the passing of the winter solstice.

What can we deduce from the fact that "A nocturnall" includes language and imagery that relate, on the one hand, to Donne's verse letters to Lady Bedford, and, on the other, to the two *Anniversaries*? Obviously, he was prepared write in much the same fashion whenever it benefitted him to praise a lady; and

while "A nocturnall" does not seem to have been written for purposes of self-advancement, we may easily conclude that it uses and refashions earlier material (assuming, of course, that it post-dates the poems with which I have compared it). But there is another possible explanation for the coincidences that I have cited. Late in 1612, soon after Donne had returned from his trip abroad with Sir Robert Drury, the Countess fell dangerously ill.¹⁰ Perhaps it was at this time that Donne composed "A nocturnall," and perhaps he even thought that it could be circulated in the event of her death. Thus we may, if we choose, regard "A nocturnall" as Donne's attempt to restore the kind of praise that he had bestowed on Elizabeth Drury to the Countess, whose probable death must have increased his sense of having neglected her. We must not, however, overlook the story reported by Walton, concerning the vision that Donne is supposed to have had, while in Paris with Drury, in which he saw his wife bearing a dead child in her arms.¹¹ Anne Donne had been pregnant at the time of Donne's departure, and he must have been extremely concerned for her health in order to have experienced such a vision. I suggest, therefore, that the dead woman of "A nocturnall" may be seen as a composite of Anne Donne and Lady Bedford. But she is also, like the exalted Elizabeth Drury of the *Anniversaries*, "the Idea of a Woman and not as she was."¹²

In "A nocturnall," Donne creates a kind of theatrical relationship between his speaker and those whom he supposes to be his auditors. We recall that in "The Exstasy," the two lovers converse by means of "souls language" (22) as they are watched and overheard by a third figure. Similarly, in "A nocturnall," Donne signifies that the speaker's words are intended to reach beyond the situation in which he is placed: "Study me then, you who shall lovers bee / At the next world, that is, at the next Spring" (10-11). In "The Exstasy," the connection between the

¹⁰ Bald, p.275.

¹¹ Bald, p.252

¹² Drummond of Hawthornden records that Donne used these words in reply to Jonson's accusations "that Dones Anniversarie was profane and full of blasphemies" and that "if it had been written of ye Virgin Marie it had been something." See *Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden*, excerpt in Patrides, pp.398-99.

lovers is figuratively transformed, as they return to their bodies, from an ideal language to a text:

To'our bodies turne wee then, that so
 Weake men on love reveal'd may looke;
 Loves mysteries in souls doe grow,
 But yet the body is his booke.

(69-72)

These lines may be seen as a taunt to the reader, whose exclusion from the lovers joys is implicitly compared with his distance from the text before his eyes. The auditors of "A nocturnall" - "you who shall lovers bee" (10) - are similarly given to understand that the speaker has turned into a text. This metamorphosis occurs at the point where the desolation of the speaker's nocturnal setting is deemed inadequate as an emblem of his condition: "Yet all these seem to laugh, / Compar'd with mee, who am their Epitaph (8-9). The speaker's transformation to an "epitaph" justifies the imperative, "Study me, then" (10), whereby the "lovers" are brought into the poem. They must therefore be conceived as both listeners and readers; and there is, accordingly, a strong suggestion that any reader of "A nocturnall" is of their number.

Yet the lovers of "A nocturnall" are strikingly dissimilar to the disembodied eavesdropper of "The Exstasy." Indeed, the two poems construct situations which are in some respects the reverse of each other. In "A nocturnall" it is the speaker's turn to be solitary and incorporeal. The lovers, on the other hand, consist not merely of a couple, but a crowd: "all" (41) may look forward to the year's renewal. Yet the lovers' delights are a matter of indifference to the speaker: theirs is merely "the lesser Sunne" (38). His grief is as exclusive and as proudly displayed as the love-making of "The Exstasy." Not content to be "an ordinary nothing" (35), he is less even than "the first nothing" (29). He alone can feel such exceptional despair; while the lovers, whose joys are mundane by comparison, remain, like observer of "The Exstasy," "within convenient distance" (24).

The success of "A nocturnall," by comparison with "The Dissolution," owes much to the fact that Donne has created an

audience for his soliloquy. From the point at which the lovers are introduced, the poem's words take on a spoken quality that helps to carry us through its convoluted argument. Moreover, the lovers are like the adversarial figures of "Satyre III," to the extent that provide a point of comparison that enables the speaker to define himself. They justify what he has to say; and are, to that extent, comparable with the "love" who wrought "new Alchimie" (13); the "others" (closely identified with the lovers) who "draw all thats good, / Life, soul, forme, spirit" (19); and even the woman whose "death" causes the speaker to become "the elixir" "of the first nothing." Each is a point of departure, stimulating Donne's words like the omitted remarks of the silent interlocutor of "The Canonization." Without these figures, Donne could hardly have elaborated the complex, descending *scala natura*, with its references to alchemy, Aristotelian philosophy, Creation theology, and the Book of Genesis. It is partly by means of this multiform *scala natura* that Donne imparts mobility to his static *topos*: "the years midnight" (1). Thus, in "A nocturnall," Donne invents a substitute for the shifting context found in poems such as "The Flea" and developed, on a grand scale, in *Metempsychosis*. Narrative time is replaced a series of analogies which reverse the sequences of alchemical transformation, biblical Creation, and Aristotelian teleology. Moreover, Donne not only lists these analogies, but treats each one of them as an experimental and transitory version of himself. In the chapter which dealt with Donne's relationship to Ovid, I pointed out that Donne incorporates himself in to his narratives, much as Ovid does by turning himself into Corinna's ring. In "A nocturnall," Donne undergoes an extended metamorphosis, becoming "every dead thing" and as many degrees of "nothing" as he can possibly contrive. And yet he never ceases to speak.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bald, R. C., *John Donne: A Life*. Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1970.
- Bacon, Francis, "Of Truth." in *The Essays, The Wisdom of the Ancients, New Atlantis*. London: Cassell & Co., 1907.
- *Novum Organon or True Suggestions for the Interpretation of Nature*. London: William Pickering, 1850.
- Baumlin, James S., *John Donne and the Rhetorics of Renaissance Discourse*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991.
- Bahktin, Mikhail M., *The Dialogic Imagination*. ed. Michel Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994.
- Breton, Nicholas, "An Effeminate Fool" in *The Literature of Renaissance England* Ed. John Hollander and Frank Kermode. London: Oxford University Press, 1973.
- Carey, John, *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art*. London: Faber and Faber, 1981.
- ed. *John Donne*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Cameron, Euen, *The European Reformation* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.
- Chadwick, Owen, *The Reformation*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964

- Clark, Donald L., *Rhetoric and Poetry in the Renaissance*.
New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1963.
- Clark, Sandra ed. *Amorous Rites: Elizabethan Erotic Verse*
London: Everyman, 1994.
- Donne, John, *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour* (1651).
intro. M.T. Hester. New York: Scholars' Facsimiles &
Reprints, Inc., 1997.
- _____ *Paradoxes and Problems in No man is an island*
Ed. Rivers Scott. London: Folio Society, 1997.
- _____ *The Sermons of John Donne* ed. Evelyn Simpson
and George Potter. Berkeley: University of
California Press, 1953.
- _____ *The Complete English Poems*. Ed. C.A. Patrides.
London: Everyman, 1985.
- Drummond of Hawthornden, William, *Conversations with
William Drummond of Hawthornden* (excerpt) in
John Donne: The Complete English Poems. Ed. C.A.
Patrides. London: Everyman, 1994.
- Freud, Sigmund, *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious*.
trans. A.A. Brill. New York: Dover, 1993.
- Gardner, Helen ed., *The Metaphysical Poets*. Harmondsworth:
Penguin, 1957.
- Guss, Donald L., *John Donne, Petrarchist*. Detroit, Michigan:
Wayne State University Press, 1966.
- Gosse, Edmund, *The Life and Letters of John Donne, Dean of St.
Paul's* 2 Vols. Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1959.

- Grierson, H.J.C. ed. *The Poems of John Donne*. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912.
- Herbert, George, *The Works of George Herbert*. intro. T. Cook. Ware: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1994
- Hobbes, Thomas, *Leviathan* ed. & intro. C.B. Macpherson. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968.
- Jakobson, Roman, "Linguistics and poetics." in *Modern Criticism and Theory*. Ed. David Lodge. London: Longman, 1988.
- "The metaphoric and metonymic poles." in *Modern Criticism and Theory*. Ed. David Lodge. London: Longman, 1988.
- Johnson, Samuel, 'The Life of Cowley.' in *The Metaphysical Poets*. Ed. G. Hammond. London: Macmillan, 1974.
- Jonson, Ben, *The Alchemist*. ed. J.B. Steane. London: Cambridge University Press, 1967.
- Kawasaki, Toshihiko, "Donne's Microcosm." in *Seventeenth Century Imagery*. Ed. Earl Miner. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971.
- Legouis, Pierre, *John Donne, Craftsman*. New York: Russell and Russell, 1962.
- Leishman, J.B., *The Monarch of Wit*. London: Hutchinson & Co., 1951.
- MacColl, Alan, "The Circulation of Donne's Poems in Manuscript." *John Donne: Essays in Celebration*. Ed. A.J. Smith. London: Methuen, 1972.
- Mazzaro, Jerome, *Transformations in the Renaissance English*

New York: Cornell University Press, 1970.

Mazzeo, Joseph A., *Renaissance and Seventeenth Century Studies*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1964.

Montaigne, Michel Eyquem de, "Of the Art of Conference." in *The Essays of Michel Eyquem de Montaigne*. (*Great Books of the Western World*. Vol. 25) Trans. C. Cotton. Ed. W.C. Hazlitt. Chicago: Britannica, 1952.

Ovid (Publius Ovidius Naso), *Amores*. In *Ovid: The Love Poems* trans. A.D. Melville intro. E.J. Kennedy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

----- *Metamorphoses*, trans. A.D. Melville. intro. E.J. Kennedy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Parfitt, George, *John Donne: A Literary Life*. London: Macmillan, 1989.

Plato, *The Symposium*. in *Dialogues of Plato*. Intr. J.D. Kaplan. New York: Washington Square Press 1961.

Puttenham, George, *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589). ed. A. Arber. London: A. Constable & Co. Ltd., 1906.

Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet*. Ware: Wordsworth, 1992.

----- *Richard II*. ed. Peter Ure. 4th ed. London: Methuen, 1956.

----- *The Merchant of Venice*. ed. W. Moelwyn Merchant. London: Penguin, 1967.

----- *The Sonnets and a Lover's Complaint*. Ed. J. Kerrigan. London: Penguin, 1986.

_____ *Troilus and Cressida* ed. Kenneth Muir.
London: Oxford University Press, 1984.

_____ *Twelfth Night* ed. M.M. Mahood.
London: Penguin, 1968.

Sidney, Sir Philip, *A Defence of Poetry*. ed. & intro. Jan Van
Dorsten. London: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Sidney, Sir Philip, *Astrophel and Stella* in *Sir Philip Sidney:
Selected Poetry and Prose*. Ed. D. Kalstone. New
York: Signet, 1970.

Spenser, Edmund. *Amoretti*. in *The Poetical Works of Edmund
Spenser*. London: George Bell & Sons, 1891. 5vols.

Spenser, Edmund. *Mutability Cantos* in *The Literature of
Renaissance England*. Ed. John Hollander and
Frank Kermode London: Oxford University Press,
1973.

The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments.
(Authorized King James Version)
Boston: Christian Science Publishing Society, n.d.

Tuve, Rosamond, *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery*.
London: University of Chicago Press, 1947

Volosinov, V.I., "Reported Speech." in *Readings in Russian
Poetics* Eds. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna
Pomorska Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of
Technology, 1971.

Webster, John, *The Duchess of Malfi*. in *John Webster: Three
Plays*. Ed. D. Gunby. Harmondsworth: Penguin,
1972